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The study's conclusion is that the Johnson policy process was comparatively exclusionary and, as a result, not effective in formulating Vietnam policy. In comparison to the more open Eisenhower policy making, in the Johnson administration dysfunctional policy-making elements are identified in the executive bureaucracy, the role of the President, other policy makers, and Congress. As a result the policy process did not sustain a thorough evaluation of the alternatives and the cost of being an intervenor.

The major impact of the study is to provide another approach to the analysis of Vietnam policy and further the understanding of why the United States resorts to force in foreign affairs. It should stimulate further study of the policy process and its application to future interventionist policy development.

A COMPARATIVE POLICY-PROCESS APPROACH

TO

VIETNAM INTERVENTION

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

C.R. Scribner, MAJ, USA
B.S. United States Air Force Academy, 1966
M.A., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1974

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
1978

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10 Charles R. Scribner MAJ, USA
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027

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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of candidate Charles R. Scribner

Title of thesis A Comparative Policy-Process Approach To
Vietnam Intervention

Approved by:

Tommy R. Young, Research Advisor

John C. Bunk, Member, Graduate Faculty

T. J. Clark, Member, Consulting Faculty

Accepted this 6th day of June 1978 by [Signature]
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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual student author and do not necessarily represent the views of either the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a vast amount of ink already spilled on the American involvement in Vietnam, particularly on how the United States intervened in this Asian war.¹ The most prevalent thesis was given the widest circulation by David Halberstam's The Best and The Brightest and Arthur Schlesinger's Bitter Heritage.² Although the thesis has many subtle variations, the general theme is entrapment. The United States became progressively enmeshed in a foreign war while trying to support a small and ineptly governed Asian country. The commitment grew as one attempted remedy failed, and one requiring greater American involvement was prescribed. As a result of technological hubris, cultural ignorance, or a myriad of other shortcomings, policymakers were eternally optimistic that the next prescription would be the cure. Finally the blunt instrument of military force was the only remaining means of saving the country, and its application led to the Americanization of the Vietnamese war. Illusions and misconceptions enticed, then seduced the United States into an Asian war.

¹Although etymologists generally agree that "Vietnam" is correct, the American version of "Vietnam" will be used.

²David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, (New York: Random House, 1969) and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam & American Democracy, 1941-1966, rev. ed., (New York: Fawcett World, 1968).

Conversely, there is a more recent explanation of American intervention in Vietnam which challenges the validity of the entrapment thesis. According to this second interpretation, the United States was not seduced, but entered the war in a pragmatic, calculating manner. Based on a realistic assessment, policymakers opted for military intervention to prevent the loss of South Vietnam. Pessimism, rather than optimism, over the possible consequences of a Communist Southeast Asia motivated the decision to commit American military might to a costly intervention. The estimated risk in terms of international relations and domestic politics of not increasing the American commitment was unacceptable. This interpretation owes its genesis and credibility to the Defense Department's history of American decisionmaking in Vietnam, commonly referred to as the Pentagon Papers and two of the history's authors; Leslie H. Gelb and Daniel Ellsberg.¹

The difference in these two interpretations are considerable. The first concludes that the United States

¹See Leslie H. Gelb, "Vietnam: Some Hypothesis about Why and How," (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1970); idem, "Vietnam: The System Worked," Foreign Policy 3, (Summer 1971): 140-167; Daniel Ellsberg, "Escalating in a Quagmire,," (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1970) and idem, "The Quagmire Myth and The Stalemate Machine," Public Policy 2 (Spring 1971): 217-74.

unwillingly got stuck to a tar baby. The second reaches the opposite conclusion, the decision makers decided to take on a sticky war to avoid the ignominious repercussion of walking on by. Daniel Ellsberg credits the policy makers with a clear vision of where greater commitments would lead and wishes to hold them responsible for a "bad" policy. He views the entrapment thesis as a means of morally excusing decisionmakers on the basis of well intentioned motives but incompetent policymaking. Although in a less moralistic vein, Leslie Gelb also excuses the policy system:

If Viet-Nam were a story of how the system failed, that is, if our leaders did not do what they wanted to do or if they did not realize what they were doing or what was happening it would be easy to package a large and assorted box of policy-making panaceas. For example: fix the method of reporting from the field. Fix the way progress is measured in a guerrilla war. Make sure the President sees all the alternatives. But these are all third-order issues, because the U.S. political-bureaucratic system did not fail, it worked.¹

Behavioral reasons such as a Cold War mentality or the fear of public rejection for disengagement from Vietnam are given as the rationale for interventionism. In other words, the premises and goals of the policy were defective; and therefore, the policy system, no matter how

¹ Gelb, "Vietnam: The System Worked," p. 165.

efficiently operated, could not have produced the desired end.

Unfortunately, this behavioral approach is also too narrow to completely explain American involvement in Vietnam. It reverses the emphasis of the entrapment theory and excuses any possible defects in the policy system. The behavioral advocate's contention that the foreign policy system worked: informing, generating options, executing and evaluating policy is not supportable. Post World War II Southeast Asian policy is too riddled with periods of crisis management, although the policy objectives remained relatively constant, to be considered the product of a finely tuned rational policy system. We may even agree with Gelb that any one of these systemic defects are of a "third-order" but their long-run cumulative effect on the system are of the first-order of magnitude. There is a danger of trading one false assumption for another. Instead of postulating that the leaders were prisoners of events, the behaviorist assume the mind-set of the decision makers doomed the Vietnam policy. Inevitably, if no major deficiencies exist in the system and the impact of the policy-making environment is discounted, we are left with the conclusion that "bad" men made "bad" policy on Vietnam. The prescription is equally

obvious: elect and select "good" men, and there will be no more Vietnams for the United States.¹ Unfortunately such a Platonic solution is not likely in our present society.

The foregoing discussion points out the hazard of accepting either explanation as the definitive answer to a number of questions. If the premise that American involvement grew out of misinformation and misplaced optimism is rejected and agree, in principle, that intervention was the result of a "worst case" analysis based on faulty premises, there is still no valid answer to why these premises persisted. To state the fact that at least three consecutive Presidents, for various reasons, stubbornly endorsed the domino theory does not explain how this premise was sustained for decades at an ever increasing cost.

Policy rigidity is not only a product of a decision maker's preconceptions but also is derived from the kinds of options that are generated and processed. What alternatives were available and how were they presented and

¹Kenneth Waltz presents three images of the theoretical reason for war; the entrapment analysis would be a third image, the nature of the international environment, the behavioral analysis a first image, and the analysis to follow would fall under the second image, the state more specifically the policy process within the United States, idem, Man the State and War, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

evaluated by the leadership? How were decisions implemented and results evaluated? "If the analyst limits his attention to policies that differ only incrementally from the status quo," one scholar observes, "then it follows that he attends to a smaller variety than all the possible policies that might be imagined."¹ Furthermore, to postulate a policy making system with a smooth flow of directives being transformed into coordinated actions or a rational model of the policy system is not unchallengeable. Enough research has been done on the domestic political system and other foreign policy events to allow reasonable doubt about the validity of the statement that the system "worked."² Rather than a premature closure on the explanation of "how it happened" or a search for a single over-arching theoretical explanation, prevailing wisdoms must be challenged from many different analytical vantage points before the "Vietnam story" will be complete.

¹David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom, A Strategy of Decision, (New York: Free Press, 1970), p. 88.

²For example, see Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," American Political Science Review, 58 (September 1969): 689-91 and 698-718.

A Different Viewpoint: The Policy Process

The general subject of this study will be the policy system. No claim is made that the "system" is responsible for American intervention in Vietnam, but the implicit assumption is that the system did not work well and was a major contributing factor to faulty policy. However, a comprehensive evaluation of the policy system is not attempted. Such an evaluation would have to focus not only on "how" but also on the "why" and "ought" of the policy content as well as the way it was generated. What is attempted is an analysis of the most critical portion of the policy process that led to intervention. At the outset a bias against exonerating the policy system was stated; likewise, little value would be gained from a study that arbitrarily condemned the Vietnam policy process by contrasting it to some pluralistically ideal policy process. When we say something works "well" or "poorly," there is an implied comparison between some standard reference and the thing being evaluated. In this regard, rather than devising a Weberian ideal type for interventionist policy, if that could be done, this study will take the policy process that culminated in President Eisenhower's decision not to intervene at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and compare and contrast it to President Johnson's decision to fully commit the United

States to an Asian war. To be sure, much arbitrariness still remains in the proposed comparison, but many of the policy variables such as threat perception, geo-political considerations, and the policy network remained relatively constant.

By using the 1954 policy process as an empirical baseline, it should be possible to determine the variance between this policy process that led to a negotiated settlement and the 1965 policy making that produced a military intervention. By limiting the study's focus to interventionist policy, we need only consider the policy factors that could have or actually did lead to a greater military commitment to Vietnam. For this reason much of the narrative history of other policy issues will not be considered in the case studies. Instead the case studies (in Chapters II and III) will provide the background for the examination of the two policy processes (in Chapter IV). The comparative analysis and conclusions (in Chapter V) will be derived from this substantive base.

An interpretative analysis of the two administrations will reveal the characteristics of two different policy-making processes. Specifically, the interaction among the President, other principal executive

advisors from the White House staff, the Department of Defense and State, the National Security Council, the intelligence agencies, and members of Congress. Moreover, the orientation will be on how these individuals influences the policy process. Important differences in policy development and implementation in the two administrations had a definite impact on questions of military intervention. Comparative questions will be posed and answered: was the policy formulation more open or closed under the Johnson administration? What was the difference in the role of Congress in policy legitimation and appropriation? What were the significant differences in Presidential leadership which influenced the policy process?

The answers to these and other questions will form the basis for some tentative conclusions in the final chapter. These conclusions will not deal with any substantive issues such as the merits of the enclave strategy or whether North Vietnam should have been bombed. This study is restricted to analyzing the policy processing and not the merits of any policy or the larger question of whether entering the war in 1965 was an appropriate decision. Those issues have been, and will continue to be, extensively discussed and debated. But conclusions here will be a product of the preceding comparative

analysis. Hopefully, the conclusions and the supporting discourse will help extend the inquiry about the "lessons learned" from the Vietnam experience to the policy system -- not to condemn or vindicate but to understand and better control a policy process that can end in war. However, before proceeding further, some explanation of the policy system and its functions is necessary to establish a common frame of reference for examining the case studies and understanding the subsequent analysis.

CHAPTER I

THE POLICY-PROCESS APPROACH

Although foreign policy issues are widely debated, little attention is devoted to how policy is developed. Concepts used to analyze domestic policy making and political administration are rarely applied to the foreign policy process. Critical questions about the development of foreign policy are largely ignored or left to journalists or "insiders" who take a narrow, personal approach to policy. Consequently, no academically or scientifically approved procedure exists for approaching the subject. Moreover, this methodological difficulty is compounded by the fact that there is no scholarly consensus on foreign policy making. The rational-actor and bureaucratic models are most widely accepted, and some of the characteristics from both paradigms will be incorporated in the proposed method of analyzing the policy process.¹ Thus, what follows is a short discussion of the policy process, the policy system, and the functions of its subsystem. The scope of discussion will be limited to

¹See John Spanier and Eric M. Uslaner, How American Foreign Policy is Made (New York: Praeger, 1974).

policy concepts that are directly related to the present study and is not intended to be a definitive exposition on the foreign policy process. This analysis orients on broad functional concepts that consider cross-institutional and inter-level policy relationships, rather than the more traditional institutional process. Policy is viewed as a general pattern of action or behavior attributed to a group of decision makers. Policy is a theoretical construct and not an immutable formulation. In reality it has no beginning or end but is a continuous chain of events that we arbitrarily segregate and focus our attention on. For example, one analyst explains the open-ended, dynamic quality as follows:

Thus, policy does not seem to be a self-defining phenomenon; it is an analytic category, the contents of which are identifiable by the analyst rather than by the policy maker or pieces of legislation or administration. There is no unambiguous datum constituting policy and waiting to be discovered in the world. A policy may usefully be considered as a course of action or inaction rather than specific decisions or actions, and such a course has to be perceived and identified by the analyst in question.¹

¹H. Hugh Heclo, "Review Article: Policy Analysis," British Journal of Political Science, 2 (January 1972): 85.

Clearly, no apriori, common understanding exists for what is meant by "policy" whether it is "defense policy," "social security policy," or "foreign policy." Thus, it is incumbent upon each analyst to define his treatment of the concept of policy.

For the purposes of this study, foreign policy is the actions whose principle goal is safeguarding the nation's security thus insuring that the basic values of American society are not threatened by an external source. The study's scope is initially narrowed to the military assistance program which is used to train and equip the forces of a country that has one or more national objectives which compliment the national interests of the United States. If American foreign policy is not achieving its goals through military assistance and the goals are perceived as vital, but not reachable through non-military means then either the policy goals must be changed as will be shown in the 1954 policy outcome, or the United States must institute a policy of military intervention as happened in Vietnam Cira 1965. Military intervention is the direct application of military force as an instrument of foreign policy. "Military intervention implies an active, calculated step," two analysts of military affairs explain, "a forceful interference in another nation's external and internal affairs, to maintain or

change a condition or situation, presuming this coercion will benefit or protect the initiator."¹ In other words, by peeling the foreign policy onion through military assistance, we find an inner layer of interventionism. Of course we are ignoring the other non-military policy layers such as economic and technological aid because this study's focus is on military intervention in Vietnam, and non-military policy instruments played a minor role. Furthermore, because this analysis requires no differentiation, foreign policy, policy relating to military assistance, and interventionist policy will all be used interchangeably when referring to United States policy in regard to Vietnam.² Data in the case studies and analysis will be omitted or included to support this analytical conception of "foreign policy."

¹ Morris Janowitz and Ellen P. Stern, "The Limits of Military Intervention: A Propositional Inventory," Military Review 3 (March 1978): 12.

² Also there is no need to draw a distinction between "decision making" and "policy making," because both are used to describe the policy process. However, policy "system" and "process" are not interchangeable. A system refers to two or more policy actors participating in patterned or structured interaction, influenced by shared values and motivated toward the achievement of some goal. Process refers to the actions or functions (pattern of actions which have a similar effect) which take place within a system. See David Easton's trilogy The Political System (New York: Knopf, 1953), A Framework for Political Analysis (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), and A Systems Analysis of Political Life (New York: Wiley, 1965).

CHARACTERISTICS

Next, we need to have a mutual understanding of how the foreign policy was made. Most writers select one of two basic models to explain policy making: the rational actor or the bureaucratic.

The rational actor model assumes that policy makers act in a unitary fashion and follow set policy procedures. They determine the goals and values that are to be achieved and maximized, generate possible options for attaining the given goal, order the options according to perceived consequences, and select the options most likely to achieve the goal. These assumptions are more prevalent in international politics as opposed to domestic politics because nations have been viewed as collective entities in balance of power theories.¹ Although the model's utility has been severely challenged by political analysis, it seems to be a valuable analytical tool, especially in the crisis decision-making area. During periods of crisis management, the President with the advice of a few top advisors decides

¹For the classic work see Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 5th ed., 1973), 1:3-23.

upon a course of action and makes policy decisions that the bureaucracies, Congress, and public opinion can only react to and not directly influence.¹ For our purpose, the rational actor approach has great utility in explaining Vietnam policy making. Policy goals were articulated, alternatives weighed, and decisions made by a small group of principal actors; moreover, most of the documentation such as the Pentagon Papers and presidential memoirs add credence to the conviction that this paradigm can accurately reflect reality.

However, in respect to Vietnam there are reasons to doubt the total efficacy of the rational actor model. In neither of the foreign policy cases we will examine did the time constraint inordinately compress the policy arena. Both Congress and the federal bureaucracy had ample time to influence the policy process. Certainly the policy makers in 1954 had much less time than did

¹The 16th through the 28th of October 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis can best be analyzed using this model, although scholars have supplemented the analysis from other approaches.

their counterparts in 1965, but significantly this comparatively short time span did not result in a closure of the policy arena. In addition, Vietnam policy making did not conform to the sequential flow stipulated in the rational model. In both case studies different groups of actors had selected different options for implementation and were seeking legitimacy for their policy. "Hawks" and "doves" within the administration would barely agree on the broad policy objectives much less the consequences of adopting alternatives. If we are to better understand how policy is really made, the internecine milieu inherent in this type of foreign policy making must not be overlooked for the sake of parsimony and order.

To modify the assumption of rationality we look to the bureaucratic model. Instead of a unitary actor, the sometimes discordant voices of many policy actors are assumed, each with differing individual and bureaucratic perspectives derived from particular interests. Policy making becomes an attempt to satisfactorily reconcile all the policy preferences of the various players who inevitably interpret the policy goal and select the alternative that conforms to preconceived interests. Bargaining and compromise are the essence of the bureaucratic model because of the political nature of foreign

policy. Charles E. Lindblom coined both the terms "muddling through" and "disjointed incrementalism" as an explanation of all policy making.¹ "Disjointed," as it relates to foreign policy means that separate alternative responses to objectives have many sources and may not be coordinated or ordered by any rational method. "Incrementalism" refers to the selection of policy alternatives that represent only a small evolutionary change from the status quo or previous policy. "Muddling through" takes on this meaning for one government official:

The making of foreign policy is a groping effort of understanding the nature of the evolving world around us. It is a painful sorting out of our own goals and purposes. It is tentative, incremental experimentation with various means for achieving these purposes. It is unremitting argument and debate among various constituencies about all these questions and an attempt to build a consensus on how the United States as the United States should decide on these questions and what action it should take.²

Therefore, since the foreign policy being considered here was made for the most part without a drastic time restraint and with sufficient latitude for extensive deliberations, one is tempted to discard the rational actor

¹Charles E. Lindblom, Intelligence of Democracy (New York: Free Press, 1965).

²Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 568.

model, but there is reason to hesitate. In both case studies periods of "unremitting argument and debate" were punctuated by much shorter periods of intense crisis management. It was during these periods that policy was rapidly changed. To describe the policy changes as "disjointed incrementalism" is stretching the meaning. In 1954, the decision to seek British partnership before a possible intervention was a new policy constraint added at the eleventh hour by the President, at the request of some influential Congressmen. Previously British partnership had not been a necessary prerequisite for intervention, and its inclusion vastly complicated any interventionist policy. Likewise, President Johnson's decision to bomb North Vietnam was made within a relatively closed policy arena with a prevailing crisis atmosphere. In these cases and others, the President acted as a unitary actor, presumably following a rational course of action, neither disjointed or muddled but directed at a specific policy objective. Given the willingness to act, the President's Constitutional authority as Commander-in-Chief gave him the freedom to institute an interventionist policy virtually unrestrained by bureaucratic politics.¹

¹The War Powers Act of 1973 attempts to limit this presidential authority to sixty days without congressional sanction.

Consequently, we will use both models to explain policy making, specifically focusing our attention on bureaucratic aspects in discussing policy alternatives, then shifting our attention to the President and his principal advisors during periods of crisis management. Since these models are only conceptual devices for explaining foreign policy, no policy analysis is complete without a mingling of both.

From the admixture of both the rational actor and the bureaucratic model, we may posit the following foreign policy making characteristics:

1. During periods of crisis, the policy making arena is smaller, encompassing a small number of key actors at the very top of the executive decision making hierarchy.

2. Program policy decisions are more deliberate and made in an expanded decisional environment to include input from the bureaucracies, Congress and other outside sources. Moreover, proper policies are expressions of continuing goals. They tend to be distinguishable by routinized development among a stable set of actors such as interagency alliances among "hawks" and "doves" with shared conviction in one or more issue areas.

3. At best, Vietnam foreign policy as opposed to domestic policy or even other types of foreign policy was made by a relatively small elite located in the executive branch. The primary political leadership and bureaucratic officers were the President, Special Assistant on National Security Affairs, Secretaries of State and Defense, their Under Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries plus senior professional officers of State, Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency. Other departments and agencies such as the Department of the Treasury had actors who played an intermittent role in the process.

4. Most policy decisions are a product of bureaucratic politics. The impact of bureaucratic interest must be accounted for in policy making. But while conflict is prevalent, the need for some kind of policy produces a "strain toward agreement or consensus."¹ Moreover, slow incremental change is the usual rate.

5. The President is the central, key actor in the foreign policy process. Although noncrisis policy allows for the interplay of bureaucratic interests, the President's role should not be devalued to that of just another bureaucratic player. He is not just one chief among

¹Hilsman, p. 541.

many chiefs but undoubtedly the most important policy actor. As the elected official of all the people, he has the popular mandate and Constitutional authority to be pre-eminent in the direction of foreign policy. He naturally appoints officials who reflect his values and are expected to be loyal to him as well as their agencies. It is his prerogative to fire them if he finds their first loyalty in question. On one hand, to be effective, bureaucratic players must seek presidential access and influence, on the other hand, the President may completely negate their role. One analyst observed, "The ability of bureaucracies to independently establish policies is a function of presidential values. The Chief Executive involves himself in those areas which he determines to be important."¹ The very nature of Vietnam policy kept demanding presidential attention.

6. Congress is a peripheral policy actor. Although Congressmen who specialize in foreign policy mobilize public opinion and play an important role in policy making, Congress as a whole was uninformed and

¹Stephen K. Krasner, "Are Bureaucracies Important?" Foreign Policy 3 (Summer 1972) 168. This article is an excellent critique, including the analytic shortcoming of the bureaucratic model, p. 154-79.

and generally supportive of presidential Vietnam policy initiatives. (Of course, this characteristic is more open to challenge in the post Vietnam era.)

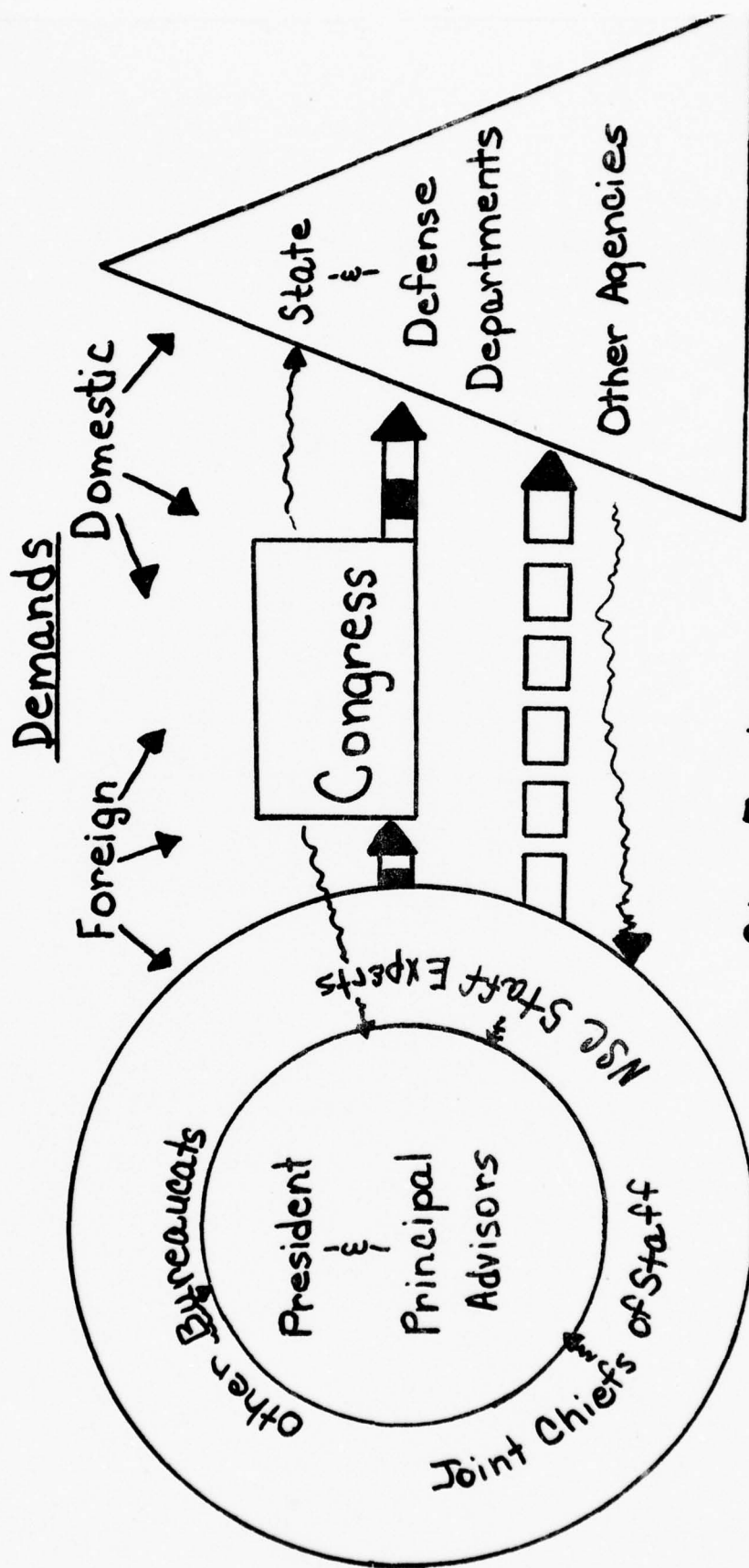
7. The impact of the public, interest groups, and political parties are not given any comprehensive attention in this study. They are indirectly assessed through Congress and the other principal policy actors. The "national will" as perceived by all policy actors especially the President, imposed certain constraints on the policy process and will be discussed.

Taken together, these characteristics and the preceeding discussion of models suggest a dynamic policy system subject to varying degrees of pluralism, compromise, incrementalism, and continual adjustment.

FUNCTIONS

Therefore, the final task is to explain the policy system and its processes as the analytical framework for this study. The purpose of such a framework is nothing more esoteric than a means to unravel how the foreign policy process works. Moreover, it is possible to eliminate or abbreviate some of the activities found in a

VIETNAM POLICY PROCESS



Policy Functions

Formulation → Legitimation & Appropriation → Implementation

Policy Flow { Normal Crisis

Policy Influence

domestic policy process or a more typical, non-interventionist foreign policy process.¹ For example, the pattern or activities that normally take place between the period a problem is perceived and presented to the government is not relevant here because the problem was perceived and defined in government and remained constant, i.e., how to stop the spread of Communism by aiding a friendly government in Indochina, then South Vietnam. Likewise, termination of the problem or resolution, only became a serious activity during the Nixon administration, although some feeble attempts at a negotiated settlement were made earlier. Policy implementation and evaluation will be discussed when they provided stimulus to the policy makers

¹The policy process explained here is adopted from Charles O. Jones's public policy model in which he lists the following systems (functions) and their outputs.

| <u>System</u> | <u>Output</u> |
|------------------------|--|
| Problem Identification | Demand for action to resolve a problem |
| Formulation | Proposal to resolve a problem |
| Legitimation | Program (legitimate course of action) |
| Implementation | Action to apply |
| Evaluation | Recommendation to adjust (e.g., demand for new policy or different interpretations of existing policy) |

from idem, An Introduction to the Study of Public Policy, 2d ed. (North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1977), p. 11-12.

to reformulate their program, which in turn starts a new cycle in the policy process. In this manner new policy evolves from old policy, and new initiatives were not developed in a vacuum but were spawned by current, ineffective policy. For instance, once it was evident that the bombing of North Vietnam was not fulfilling the policy objectives, the search for a new strategy began in earnest. In shifting the attention from the usual focal point, the policy input and output functions, our focus centers on how policy is made in government. The actions or patterned activities in government can be further subdivided into the sequential functions of formulation, legitimation, and appropriation. Again because of the nature of interventionist policy, most of the analysis will be devoted to formulation and legitimation.

Before offering a more detailed explanation of formulation and legitimation, one important caveat must be made. Like the previously discussed models, these functional activities are used as discrete analytical categories. In reality, the policy process is more chaotic with all the functional activities occurring at other stages of the patterned activities. For example, members of an agency charged with implementing a given policy are informally evaluating the policy as it is

being implemented, and the results of this informal evaluation has a great influence on how successful a policy will be before it is formally appraised. As the troop commander, General Westmoreland's lack of faith in the enclave strategy in the summer of 1965 almost guaranteed this military policy a negative evaluation before it was initiated. Likewise, when a policy is being formulated, policy makers must consider its outcome to the point of termination. Of course, this result or predicted outcome does not always conform to reality. Whether characterized as optimistic or pessimistic, all the Vietnam policy was formulated on the premise that direct military aid would eventually be reduced, and finally replaced by more development assistance. In other words, with the possible exception of the redefining of the problem, the Vietnam policy process was experiencing more than one functional activity simultaneously. This or any other analytical study of policy making imposes an orderliness on the policy system that is in reality characterized by discordant juxtapositioning of systemic elements and by a large amount of uncertainty about the policy process. What President Kennedy observed about making major policy decisions has been often echoed: "The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer -- often,

indeed, to the decider himself ... There will always be the dark and tangled stretches in the decision-making process -- mysterious even to those who may be most intimately involved."¹ Having expressed these analytical limitations, the remaining discussion is devoted to the three primary functional activities used in this study: formulation, legitimation, and appropriation.

POLICY FORMULATION

First, having been derived from "formula," formulation simply means to make a plan, a prescription, or formal program for alleviating an adverse condition, in this case the "Vietnam problem." Its most identifiable characteristic is that means are submitted by individual or groups of policy actors to resolve the problem as they perceive it. Although there is no set method by which policy formulation proceeds, how well it is done has a tremendous impact on any outcome. Therefore, in the study's analysis we will be looking for the answers to critical questions concerning policy formulation. And since Vietnam policy formulation was the exclusive

¹John F. Kennedy quoted in Allison, p. 1.
(emphasis his)

prerogative of the executive branch of government, the answers to these questions for both administrations will be compared and discussed. Significant contrasts or variances in policy formulation will be further analysed to determine some characteristics that help to explain the different policy outputs which ultimately determined the degree of intervention. The questions which will facilitate this determination are as follows:

1. How many sets of actors were producing competing proposals?
2. How was sufficient support for the accepted proposal generated?
3. Did the "losers" have appeal points and access to the President?
4. After a proposal had sufficient support for acceptance, specifically presidential endorsement, was it immediately processed for implementation or was there a "cooling" period?
5. What type of formulation prevailed?

Routine. Treating the problem as a regular agenda item within the established bureaucratic operating procedures for that particular issue area.

Analogous. Recognizing the problem as "new," but developing proposals based on experiences with similar past problems.

Creative. Treating the problem with proposals which are unprecedented or at least a break with past practice.

6. How did the presidential policy-making style affect the formulation?

Rather than explain these "signpost" questions now, it will be more convenient to delay the explanation until the actual causes are considered in the chapter on analysis. Moreover, it is fairly obvious that a comparative evaluation of the answers to the above questions should lead to some tentative conclusions about the two policy processes. It is equally obvious that other pertinent questions could be asked, but they are beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the answers to the stated questions should help to establish a comparative profile of the Vietnam policy process for both administrations, then yield some comparative insights.

Next, the process of formulation is directed toward the functional activities of legitimation and appropriation.¹ "Conforming to recognized principles or accepted standards ..." is the most appropriate definition of

¹Here "legitimation" is being distinguished from "legitimacy" which is usually thought of as a broader term involving overall support for a given political system.

legitimation as it is used here. In general, it is a process of approval based on tradition, rules and societal norms, and in the processing of American foreign policy, it is also based on the Constitution, laws and accepted practice. Appropriations are considered here to be a secondary type of Congressional legitimation for the Vietnam policy. If Congress gave their approval to a specific policy, they could also be expected to fund it. Congress did not start using the power of the purse to thwart executive initiatives until much later in the Vietnam policy era. Therefore, appropriations will be indirectly treated as opportunity costs. Both Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson had to consider the "cost" to their administrations of an interventionist policy. This cost was expressed in terms of other policy programs which would have to be deferred or at least, inadequately funded. Thus, the economic dilemma of guns or butter had an impact on what policy would be approved. In other words, another critical question in the analysis is: how did the possible cost of an interventionist policy affect the policy-making process? A comparison of how this question was answered by both administrations should provide some additional insights into why the administrations' policy outputs differed.

Since the American political system separates policy approval from funding the same formal division is made in the study to minimize confusion. In reality, fiscal considerations may take place throughout the policy process. With the possible exception of crisis management periods, cost estimates and their impact on the acceptability of various proposals takes place in the formulation process. It should be no surprise to see actors with vested interests in domestic programs speaking out against the expense of an interventionist policy. Moreover, because of the particular nature of foreign policy and the powers of the Presidency, legitimation of an interventionist policy or an act of war can be accomplished solely by the chief executive. For example, the post Vietnam enactment of the War Powers Act, did not deter President Ford from acting on his own initiative during the Mayaguez incident. In seeking popular and Congressional approval after the fact, he was only exercising a presidential prerogative which has been established by historical precedent. In 1900 President McKinley sent the Army to China to participate in its first allied military intervention. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and Coolidge used the Marines throughout the Caribbean very liberally without Congressional sanction. Both Presidents Wilson and

Franklin Roosevelt committed acts of belligerency before war was declared, and Truman fought the Korean War without a formal declaration. Thus, history confirms the fact that the legitimization of an interventionist policy starts with the President.

However, only the Senate has the Constitutional power to declare war and Congressional approval is needed for additional funds to finance any protracted military conflict. Consequently, there are some legal reasons for Presidents wanting Congress to "sign on" or approve interventionist policy formulation. And as a hedge against unfavorable outcomes, post Korean War Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson sought Congressional legitimation before embarking upon a policy course which could lead to a protracted limited war. President Truman's failure to elicit Congressional support for the Korean War provided the example of the political misfortunes which can befall an incumbent who ignores this nicety. Consequently, both Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson were determined to have Congressional support before implementing any major policy formulation. But the manner in which the Congressional legitimation was obtained is a more important consideration for this study. Thus, our last signpost or critical question is: how did Congressional legitimation

influence the policy process? The answer to this question reflects the prevailing attitudes of the two administrations on the role Congress would play in Vietnam policy. A comparison of these attitudes and the other analysis of the questions posed and discussed above provide the study's focal point for the policy-process approach or "how it happened."

CHAPTER II

THE 1954 INDOCHINESE CRISIS

THE POLICY LEGACY

... it is clear that the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies ... the Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western World is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy.¹

During the Second World War, the United States did not adopt a clearly specified stance toward Indochina. The admixture of moralism and power politics resulted in an ambivalent policy which neither satisfied the anti-colonialists nor the French who were determined to re-establish their dominance in the area after the war. As in other political matters, all issues were determined in favor of any expedient toward ending the war. Although President Roosevelt had publicly endorsed a trusteeship for post-war Indochina as formalized in the Atlantic Charter which supported national self-determination, he acted in the best interests of his colonial

¹George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," Foreign Affairs 4 (July 1947): 577.

allies by allowing them to maintain military primacy in Southeast Asia. American aid was given to Ho Chi Minh, other Nationalist factions, and their enemy, the French in an even handed manner. As in China, the United States policy was singularly focused on defeating Japan, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend," irregardless of who else he considered the "enemy." And without a dominant military presence in Asia, the United States had little effect upon the postwar settlement. In September 1945, the British assisted the French in "re-colonizing" Indochina, and the Truman administration recognized French sovereignty over Indochina.

Initially when the Franco-Viet Minh War started in earnest in late 1946, the United States maintained a neutral position; however, this stance rapidly moved to favor French intervention after China "fell" to Mao Tse-tung and the containment policy was shifted by the Korean War from the European setting to Asia. With a perception of monolithic Communism, American policy makers became insensitive to any legitimate nationalistic tendencies in the anti-French course of action. President Truman approved the "Bao Dai solution" and the United States recognized the Associate State of Indo-China, although it was an independent state in name only.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson consummated American involvement in Southeast Asia by announcing on 8 May 1950 plans for French aid:

The United States Government convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated State of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.¹

Unfortunately for the new Eisenhower administration, the aid brought neither stability nor democratic development to this area of the world. By the time the administrations changed in January 1953, the situation had become dangerously polarized with the People's Republic of China and Soviet Union aligned with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam opposed by the French with support from the United States. Both sides had foresaken diplomatic solutions for military force and neither side knew whether its adversary would risk a third world war for a victorious outcome. The potential crisis would come when either side faced defeat or the alternative of

¹The Pentagon Papers, Gravel Edition, 3 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 1:7, hereafter referred to as Papers.

escalating the conflict. Therefore, the new administration's policy legacy was fraught with the danger of a new military intervention in Asia if the containment principle was to be upheld.

FIRST DECISION: Support the French

NATO had already been developed and was proving a barrier to further Soviet expansion in Europe. But there had been no similar development in the Far east. ... unless something comparable to NATO were formed in Asia and a line were drawn beyond which the international Communists knew they could advance only at their own peril, we would face a serious situation in that area.¹

In 1953 there was little doubt that the French effort in Indochina would receive continual support by the new administration. Having long accused the Democrats of being responsible for the "loss" of China to Communism, the Republicans were determined to fabricate an Asian containment policy in which Southeast Asia played a dominant role. The early writings and speeches of the new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, stressed the importance of this key area in the confrontation with

¹A statement that John Foster Dulles recalls making in the Senate where he briefly served. Quoted in Marvin Kalb and Elie Abel, Roots of Involvement (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 72.

Communist expansionism. Moreover, because of the importance of the Indochina peninsula as the Rice Bowl of Asia, it was imperative that the line of containment be drawn north of this vital strategic region. A special study report headed by Representative Walter Judd, the foremost Republican spokesman on Asia concluded:

The area of Indochina is immensely wealthy in rice, rubber, coal, and iron ore. Its position makes it a strategic key to the rest of Southeast Asia. If Indochina should fall, Thailand and Burma would be in extreme danger, the Communist power drive ... Communism would then be in an exceptional position to complete its perversion of the political and social revolution that is spreading through Asia ... The Communists must be prevented from achieving their objectives in Indochina.¹

Support for the French was the logical course of action to keep Indochina out of the Communist camp. Thus, it was no surprise when, in his first State of the Union Message on 3 February 1953, President Eisenhower promised a "new positive foreign policy" and went on to describe the linkage of Communist aggression in Korea to the instability in Malaya and Indochina. The French-Viet Minh War was perceived as part of the ongoing world struggle. Dulles had earlier articulated the stakes for United States foreign policy:

¹Papers, Vol. I, p. 85.

... there is a civil war in which we have, for better or worse, involved our prestige. Since that is so, we must help the government we back. Its defeat, coming after the reverses suffered by the National Government of China, would have further serious repercussions on the whole situation in Asia and the Pacific. It would make even more people in the East feel that friendship with the United States is a liability rather than an asset.¹

Therefore, the nucleus of the so-called domino theory was clearly present in the words and thinking of the Eisenhower administration, and the Indochinese policy problem, or stopping the spread of Communism, would continue to be viewed within the context of this theory. Consequently, Eisenhower's first decision to resolve the "Vietnam problem" was to continue support for the French to prevent the loss of Indochina and the expansion of Communist territorial control.

Two events quickly translated this resolve into an active policy of military assistance. First the armistice in Korea was perceived as a green light for Chinese backed military adventures along "a single Communist aggressive front" extending "from Korea on the north to Indochina in the south" as described by the Secretary

¹Quoted in Melvin Gurtov, The First Vietnam Crisis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 25.

of State. He also predicted "grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina."¹ Implicit in this statement was a nuclear threat to deter China from directly intervening in the Indochinese struggle. This signal was supported by the administration's "New Look" strategy that had massive retaliation as its cornerstone.² Secondly, the Viet Minh invasion of Laos in the spring of 1953 and the lack of French domestic support for the war stimulated a new urgency and higher tempo of military assistance to the French Union forces. Congress appropriated 400 million dollars, some 60 million less than was planned for in 1954, but then added an additional 385 million dollars in support of the Navarre Plan, a French plan for victory without the need for American forces. President Eisenhower observed that these funds were not for a selfless purpose;

So, when the United States votes \$400 million to help that war, we are not voting for a giveaway program. We are voting for the cheapest way that we can to prevent the occurrence of something that would be of the most terrible significance for the United States of America -- our security, our power and ability to get certain things we

¹Papers, Vol. 1, p. 85-86.

²Under the New Look strategic concept, nuclear forces were to deter a broad spectrum of potential Communist actions from nuclear attack to limited war. Sec. Jerome H. Kanah, Security in the Nuclear Age (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1975), pp. 9-73.

need from the riches of the Indonesian territory,
and from southeast Asia.¹

For immediate purposes, in May 1953, supplies were rushed to Laos and Thailand and six C-119's aircraft with civilian crews were provided for airlift into Laos. Also in August with United States concurrence, France transferred its battalions from Korea to Indochina. Unmistakably the Eisenhower administration was prepared to implement its policy decision to support the French. By 1954, Americans had invested over one billion dollars in the conflict, an amount which represented 78 percent of the total war costs.² If the French had been correct on their assessment of victory, the economic burden on the United States was not onerous. But this was not to be the case.

SECOND DECISION: Oppose Negotiations

This program of financing a military victory in Indochina was coordinated with the diplomatic strategy of not negotiating from a position of weakness. However,

¹President Eisenhower's Remarks at Governors' Conference, August 4, 1953, Public Papers of the President, 1953, p. 540.

²United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Part II, U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, D.C., printed for use of the House Committee on Armed Services, 1968, pp. A-17 and A-36.

this was not the negotiating stance of the French. Although some earlier peace feelers had failed, the attempts had indirectly resulted in further mobilization of French public sentiment to end the war. Combined with the example of the armistice agreements being negotiated at Panmunjom in July 1953 and the widespread disenchantment with the distant war, the reasons for a more flexible position on negotiations was fairly obvious. The French interest in a negotiated peace which, in the words of Prime Minister Laniel, would be satisfied by an "honorable solution" to the war was reflected in the French policy. Thus, strategy was to "keep fighting -- seek talking" as a hedge against the failure of the Navarre Plan.¹

Therefore, the policy of the United States to oppose negotiations pending substantial military gains was complicated by the more accommodating position of the French. Dulles did not see analogous situations in Korea and Indochina. In Korea the United Nations' forces had fought to a stalemate, and it had taken the threat of nuclear weapons to convince the adversary to compromise. In Indochina the Communists held the initiative

¹This plan increased the size of the French forces to 250,000 and the Vietnamese Army to 300,000 men in an attempt to defeat the Viet Minh in open battle by 1955.

and "negotiations with no other alternative usually end in capitulation" was Dulles' conviction.¹ He viewed the Navarre Plan not only as a means of military victory, but also necessary to improve the French negotiating positions. The timing and preconditions were the major differences in the negotiating strategies of the two countries. The United States thought it was inadvisable to have the Indochina war on the agenda of a post-armistice international conference on Korea. At this time Dulles opposed negotiating on Indochina while China was providing substantial military assistance to the Viet Minh. Because France was a principal in the Indochina war and the United States was not, the administration's decision to oppose negotiations until some unspecified future date had to be reflected in French policy. Consequently, the Laniel government had considerable leverage on Washington. They had only to hint about negotiating a settlement to strike a responsive cord in the Eisenhower administration. For example, in response to a request for assistance on 6 February 1954, only a month before the siege of Dien Bien Phu, the administration announced that an additional forty B-26 bombers and 200 American

¹Papers, Vol. I, p. 96.

technicians to maintain them would be sent to Indochina. However, even this sop could not prevent the French government from demanding Indochina be placed on the agenda at the upcoming Geneva Conference. Thus, the diplomatic dimension of the administration's policy had been blocked by the French desire to seek negotiation under less than favorable conditions. This policy setback was understandable; in the final analysis, it was France's war and Washington could not control the domestic political pressure which forced the Laniel government to the conference table. Nevertheless, no domino would fall if the French military remained resolute in victory with American material and financial assistance.

THIRD DECISION: Seek United Action

... at a Sunday night meeting (on 4 April 1954) in the upstairs study at the White House Eisenhower had agreed with Dulles and Radford on a plan to send American forces to Indo-China under certain strict conditions.¹

On 13 March 1954, General Giap directed the Vietnamese Peoples Army in the first assault upon the French fortress at Dien Bien Phu. Because of the decision to put Indochina on the agenda of the Geneva Conference made

¹Sherman Adams, Firsthand Report (New York: Harner & Brothers, 1961), 122.

at the Quadripartite Foreign Minister's Berlin meeting in February, this battle had most profound political rather than military importance. Both sides knew this test of will in Northern Vietnam would have a significant impact upon the Indochina portion of the Geneva Conference to begin on 8 May 1954. Ho Chi Minh later asserted: "The Dien Bien Phu victory which was won on the eve of the opening of the Geneva Conference exerted a great influence on the proceedings of the Conference."¹ Within days of the initial attack, the Viet Minh had destroyed a large percentage of the relatively unprotected French artillery, damaged the only airstrip, destroyed or damaged many aircraft, and virtually cut French supply lines. "Had they so wished," one scholar speculates, "Communist forces could have probably overrun the entire fortress by early April, but on the advice of the Chinese, the final assault was delayed until 6 May and the fortress was occupied the next day."² This delay gave the Viet Minh a major victory at a most opportune time and forced the French to make concessions. Within this same time frame,

¹Ho Chi Minh, Selected Works, Vol. 4. (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971), p. 119.

²Robert F. Turner, Vietnamese Communism Its Origins and Development (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1975), p. 85.

the United States was searching for a new policy to favorably resolve the first Vietnam crisis.

However, at first it was hoped that more of the same type of military assistance would pull the French through. General Paul Ely, the chairman of the French Joint Chiefs of Staff, arrived on 20 March to advise the executive agencies on the French military situation, to seek a reassurance of American resolve to take action if the Chinese Air Force should attack, and to request more material assistance. The administration, realizing the French military position to be precarious, responded by providing additional assistance. At a meeting with the French general, the President directed Admiral Radford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to speed up the present aid programs. Also twenty-five additional B-26 bombers were promised. Neither the President nor Dulles gave any definite answer regarding the American response to Chinese air intervention, but Admiral Radford left the impression with General Ely that the Joint Chiefs of Staff would push for actions against the Chinese should the contingency arise. Also at the end of his visit, the French general was surprised by Radford's discussion of a plan (Operation Vulture) for United States intervention at Dien Bien Phu. In Indochina French and American officers, in a desperate search for possible

ways to relieve the besieged garrison, had developed a plan for an air strike at night with sixty B29 heavy bombers based in the Philippines and 160 other jet aircraft from carriers in the South China Sea. The plan had advanced to the point that the mission commander had already reconnoitered the target.¹ General Ely took the plan back to France where it became the preferred course of action for American intervention. Unfortunately, this led to a misunderstanding because the Radford plan had not been sanctioned by the President. Radford later stated that he had only intended to propose a possible option and not the most likely future action by the United States.² Nevertheless, this episode was indicative of a growing realization within Washington that a new policy thrust was essential, if the United States was to stop the Communist military and diplomatic advances. It was becoming increasingly evident that the French, as a surrogate, were unable and unwilling to accomplish the American policy objectives in Indochina.

The debate within the Executive Branch as to what this new policy should be had been in progress for over

¹Gurtov, pp. 79-80.

²Transcript of an interview with Admiral Arthur Radford, The Dulles Oral History Project, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, N. J.

a year. Now it was time for concrete action. Initially Radford's view of unilateral airstrikes had been favored because it conformed to the "New Look" strategy's emphasis on air power and obviated the need for American ground forces in Asia. However, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Matthew B. Ridgway, questioned both the wisdom of intervention in Southeast Asia and challenged the assumption that ground troops would not be needed. Based on the Korean experience, he argued that by airpower itself would be ineffective against the entrenched enemy at Dien Bien Phu, and a successful intervention could only be accomplished by land forces with the attendant loss of life and treasury.¹ The President had also appointed a special committee headed by Under Secretary of State, W. Bedell Smith, to further explore policy alternatives and their findings substantiated Ridgway's convictions. Thus, all these interagency deliberations actively narrowed the parameters to the following: unilateral intervention would have to include ground troops; the use of American ground forces was undesirable for logistical and political reasons; and the most desirable intervention would be collective "free world" commitment

¹Papers, Vol. I, p. 92, also see summary of Ridgway Report, p. 471.

by allied forces.¹

It became clear that the administration had adopted a "united action" policy when it was first publicly aired at the end of March. Speaking before the Overseas Press Club on 29 March, Secretary of State Dulles emphasized the massive Chinese aid to the Viet Minh and publicly revealed the administration's desire to take "united action" against the Communists in Southeast Asia. On the negative side his speech revealed French weaknesses in containing Communism and asserted that the "fall" of Indochina "would carry a grave threat to the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand ... The entire western Pacific area, including the so-called 'off-shore island chain,' would be strategically endangered."² On the positive side, the speech indicated a new resolve to keep this first domino from falling by supporting the French with military force if necessary. Eisenhower had read and approved Dulles's speech before it was given; two days later in a news conference, he publicly reinforced the administration's willingness to take action.

By the first week in April some type of military

¹Papers, Vol. I, p. 94.

²New York Times, 30 March 1954, p. 4.

action was imperative if the fort was to be saved. The French had already lost their outer perimeter defenses and were being severely punished with Chinese-supplied artillery and Viet Minh ground assaults. No one could doubt the inevitability of defeat, if an early intervention by an external military force did not occur. In anticipation of a French request for some variation of Operation Vulture, which the French incorrectly assumed already had presidential endorsement, the Executive Branch decided to consult with Congressional leaders. There seems little reason to doubt Eisenhower's often expressed conviction that Congressional approval was a necessary precondition before he would order the use of military force in international affairs. Particularly in Indochina which smacked of another Korean-type involvement, the President wanted to have Congressional support before implementing any new, irrevocable policy initiatives. In addition, Congress had not been kept fully informed on the developing crisis and was becoming restive.

Congressional anxiety had begun building early in the year over a possible war in Asia when the two hundred technicians had been sent and only post facto approval sought. At that time the President and his advisors had assured Congress that they would be consulted before any new policy was publicly announced.

However, Dulles's 29 March Press Club speech seemed to violate this pledge. As expected, without a clear statement of intentions, speculation was rife, and the issue was hotly debated. But both "hawks" and "doves" were in agreement over the need for more information. Senator Hubert Humphrey's comment was representative: " ... it has disturbed me that there seems to be a reluctance on the part of the executive branch of the Government, in the present critical situation, to fully inform the responsible committees of the Congress."¹ Obviously the administration's new policy direction confused more than it informed. As one leading columnist commented, "Even ... Mr. Dulles' supporters in the State Department ... don't know whether he is bluffing the Reds or getting the United States ready for military action in Indo-China, and after all the casual talk about 'massive retaliation,' they don't particularly like either course."² Clearly, the administration was under considerable political pressure to inform key members of Congress and give them access to the policy making. Although it should be noted that he was not to attend, the President

¹Congressional Record, C. Pt. 3, p. 4210.

²James Reston, "Art of Sudden Diplomacy," New York Times Magazine, 11 April 1954, p. 10.

called a joint Executive-Congressional meeting on the Vietnam problem.

On 3 April in response to the President's request, eight congressional leaders of both parties met with Secretary Dulles, Admiral Radford, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Roger Keyes to satisfy the expressed desire to be fully informed and more importantly from the administration's point of view, to seek approval for military intervention.¹ Although there is no available official documentation on the actual exchanges which took place during the meeting, the results are consistently agreed upon by various sources.² After a preliminary briefing by Dulles and Radford on the necessity for immediate action and the administration's prescription for action-Operation Vulture, the Congressmen voiced a number of pointed questions. If the first airstrike failed, what then, more airstrikes? If they fail, will we then commit ground troops? Admiral Radford's responses to

¹The members were: Senate Majority Leader William Knowland, Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson, Senators Eugene Milliken, Richard Russell, and Earle Clements, House Speaker Joseph Martin, Congressmen John W. McCormack, and J. Percy Priest (three Republicans and five Democrats). Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go To War," The Reporter, Vol. II, 14 September 1954, p. 31, collaborated in other sources.

²Kalb and Abel, pp. 78-79, Gurtov, pp. 94-96, and Michael A. Gukin, John Foster Dulles (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 207.

these types of questions were based on the assumptions of rapid success. When he was forced to admit that the other Joint Chiefs of Staff did not share his optimism on the effectiveness of airpower at Dien Bien Phu, the credibility of his presentation was partially lost. Likewise, Dulles had to give a negative answer to the question whether there had been an attempt made to secure collective allied action or at least notify Great Britain of the proposed action. Consequently, although a bipartisan spirit of cooperation prevailed at the meeting, rather than approval for any type of unilateral intervention, Dulles left with three conditions for congressional support: (1) "United Action" with interested countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines and the British Commonwealth, (2) the French must accelerate de-colonialization so military assistance would not bear the stigma of supporting French imperialism, and (3) the French military must not pull out and the French government must continue to support the military effort.

Obviously, these conditions by the men on the Hill thwarted any hope for immediate action; however, they did offer the basis for a policy action which guaranteed favorable support in Congress and the sharing of political risk for a military commitment. President Eisenhower expressed the results of the meeting in decidedly positive terms:

There was nothing in the preconditions or in this congressional viewpoint with which I could disagree; my judgement entirely coincided with theirs. The meeting did, however, give Secretary Dulles sufficient assurance of congressional support if these conditions were met to feel perfectly able to talk to other nations and tell them that if they would go along with our proposal we would be ready to participate in a regional grouping. Thus we could get to work.¹

In this manner Eisenhower had made his third major decision on Vietnam policy: to pursue a policy of united actions as an alternative to either the more passive alternative of accepting a negotiated settlement or the more impetuous policy of unilateral intervention.

FOURTH DECISION: Accept Negotiations

The French Command is sure of inflicting a serious defeat on the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu. We expect a long hard fight. We shall win.

General Rene' Cogny, Hanoi
quoted by A P, 2 January 1954

The gallant defenders of Dien Bien Phu have done their part ... the attackers already lost more than they could win ... learning again that the will of the free is not broken ... The violent battles now being waged in Vietnam ... are not creating any spirit of defeatism. On the contrary, they are rousing the free nations. I leave for Geneva confident.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles
Augusta, Ga., 10 April 1954

¹Eisenhower, Mandate, p. 347.

The central redoubt is about to be fully overrun. Further resistance is becoming hopeless.

General de Castries to GHQ
1645 hours, 7 May 1954

Well understood. We will destroy the guns and radio equipment. The radiotelephone link will be destroyed at 1730 hours. We will fight to the end. Au revoir, mon general. Au revoir, mes camarades. Vive la France!

General de Castries to GHQ
1700 hours 7 May 1954¹

The Executive acceptance of the Congressional restraints on United States military intervention doomed this policy to an early failure. To complicate the matter, Dulles found the British too intractable in their desire for a negotiated settlement, while the French wanted American airstrikes sans the interference of coalition. The French government only agreed to united action in the eleventh hour, too late to save the French fort. In mid-April as the situation at the French garrison became desperate, the administration seemed to be testing public and Congressional sentiment on unilateral intervention or at least some policy action. On 16 April Vice-President Nixon started some saber rattling in a speech "not for attribution" by declaring, "... if

¹All quotes from Clyde E. Pettit, The Experts (Secaucus, N. J.: Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1975), pp. 51, 61, 63, and 64 respectively.

to avoid further Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina, we must take the risk now by putting our boys in, I think the Executive has to take the politically unpopular decision and do it."¹ The public reaction left little doubt that such a decision would be extremely unpopular and the House considered putting a rider on an appropriations bill limiting the President's authority to send troops anywhere in the world without congressional consent.²

In retrospect, it is evident that the 3 April meeting with leaders of Congress not only defined the preconditions for a congressionally supported intervention, but also made it patently clear to the President that the use of military force under any other conditions would be strongly opposed. This decision point was crucial in the final policy output on Southeast Asia and the administrations's decision not to intervene at Dien Bien Phu. For once, it became evident that a united action policy could not be implemented until after the Geneva Conference, and unilateral intervention was not a suitable

¹Quoted in Eisenhower, Mandate, p. 353, also see opening quote for this section.

²Eisenhower took this challenge to executive authority seriously, see *Ibid.*, p. 353; also he was simultaneously fighting a battle against the Bricker Amendment which would have also curtailed executive prerogative in foreign policy making. See S. Adams, pp. 104-109.

policy alternative. Without Congressional support, the United States was left no alternative to a negotiated settlement. On 23 April, for the final time, a French request for an American airstrike was refused. Dulles reiterated the President's position on Congressional approval and coalition support to include the United Kingdom. He further explained that the consensus of American military opinion was that the situation at the French fort was beyond remedy no matter how much American military force was applied.¹ Three days later on the opening day of the Geneva Conference, the President publicly stated that it would be a "tragic error" to unilaterally intervene in Indochina thereby eliminating any residual doubt as to his firmness on this point. On 7 May with the Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu, American intervention was no longer a policy alternative. Neither was a collective security arrangement a feasible policy alternative because neither France nor Britain wanted to further complicate the Geneva proceedings with a new policy initiative. By the process of elimination, or a non-decision, the President was left with only one policy -- a negotiated settlement.

Faced with the loss of Tonkin or both North and

¹Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go To War," The Reporter, 14 September 1954, p. 31.

South Vietnam or possibly all of Indochina, the administration re-evaluated its Vietnam policy. The containment line was drawn further south. On 11 May Secretary Dulles assured reporters that "Southeast Asia could be secured even without perhaps Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia."¹ This envisioned shift in policy objectives exhibited a degree of flexibility in the Asian containment policy and a less immutable quality to the domino theory. Necessity had forced a reappraisal of policy assumption and goals. To solve the Vietnam problem, President Eisenhower had preferred to change the policy objective with the possible outcome of "losing" Vietnam rather than escalating the military means to a unilateral intervention. The reasons for this preference, from the policy-process perspective will be discussed in Chapter IV.

¹Papers, Vol. I, p. 106.

CHAPTER III

THE 1965 INTERVENTION

KENNEDY INTERLUDE

There is no single simple policy which meets this challenge. Experience has taught us that no one nation has the power or the wisdom to solve all the problems of the world or manage its revolutionary tides -- that extending our commitments does not always increase our security -- that any initiative carries with it the risk of a temporary defeat -- that nuclear weapons cannot prevent subversion -- that no free people can be kept without will and energy of their own -- ¹

After the Eisenhower administration's decision not to intervene at Dien Bien Phu, a negotiated settlement at the Geneva Conference was the only alternative. Along with this distasteful diplomatic policy which allowed Communist territorial gains, Washington maintained its military resolve through the hastily created Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and by sending military advisors to the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in South Vietnam. The administration continued to view Vietnam within the larger context of an Asian containment policy. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam was perceived as the surrogate of Sino-Soviet expansionism and no negotiated

¹President Kennedy's Special Message to Congress, 25 May 1961, Public Papers of the President, Kennedy, 1961.

settlement could be more than a respite from further military aggression. This perception is clearly evident in numerous public and private statements such as Eisenhower's anniversary message to South Vietnam:

Viet-Nam's very success as well as its potential wealth and its strategic location have led the Communists of Hanoi, goaded by the bitterness of their failure to enslave all Viet-Nam, to use increasing violence in their attempts to destroy your country's freedom.¹

This same message also indicates the trend toward the seemingly irreversible American commitment to the viability of South Vietnam. Whereas the President had promised the Diem government in his 1954 letter only more efficient aid programs. The 1960 message was that:

Although the main responsibility for guarding that independence will always, as it has in the past, belong to the Vietnamese people and their government, I want to assure you that for so long as our strength can be useful, the United States will continue to assist Viet-Nam in the difficult yet hopeful struggle ahead.²

Whether this pronouncement was more political rhetoric than a pledge of military intervention was never put to the test. In the North, the Vietnamese Communists were occupied with nation-building and in the South, the Viet

¹"U. S. Sends Greetings to Viet-Nam on Anniversary of Independence," Department of State Bulletin, XLIII, No. 116, 14 Nov. 1960, p. 758.

²Ibid.

Cong were still in the more militarily passive stages of revolutionary struggle. Eisenhower's equivocal commitments to Asian collective security and South Vietnam were either sources of potential intervention or embarrassment, but the United States was not irrevocably committed to Vietnam at the end of Eisenhower's presidential tenure. Moreover, although he had had to settle for half a domino, the new country was still standing. As a congressional report reflects, the fact that South Vietnam existed is an indirect tribute to the outgoing administration:

Rarely, if ever, in history has a state come into being amid such inauspicious circumstances: arbitrarily split in two at the end of a bitter eight years war; suddenly given independence after a period of colonialism during which the colonial power made no effort at all to train civil servants or to prepare the people for self-government in other ways, with an influx of 800,000 refugees from the North; confronted with open rebellion on the part of pirates and bandits masquerading as religious sects, threatened by Communist infiltration and subversion and -- with virtually no economic resources ... The most impressive thing about Vietnam is that it exists.¹

Of course, the continued existence of South Vietnam, as an American national interest within a changing international system and domestic context, would be the persistent concern of the new administration.

¹Report on a Study Mission, Senator Theodore F. Green, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 84th Cong., 2d Sess., 13 Jan. 56

The fact that this concern was translated into an Asian policy which relied most heavily on military means and a significant military presence in Southeast Asia for its implementation is sufficient to require an explanation of that policy. Without an analysis of the Kennedy administration's military commitments to Vietnam, the full-blown military intervention under the subsequent administration appears to be much more of a unique phenomenon in the policy process than it really was. Conversely, the point is not that Kennedy set an interventionist course, and Johnson could not deviate from it. Our purpose is not an apology for either decision maker, but a clear recognition that the American foreign policy making is evolutionary without an analytical beginning or end punctuated by a new President. This comment is more justifiably in this instance, considering the untimely death of President Kennedy and President Johnson's need to maintain a credible foreign policy through stability and continuity until he had received his own mandate in an election. Policy making between 1961 and 1963 forms a decisive link in the changing characteristics of the policy process between the Eisenhower and Johnson administrations. Therefore, a brief treatment of the Kennedy policy making process will further clarify the analysis.

In January 1961 President John F. Kennedy entered the White House with a new vigor toward American responsibilities for global leadership. In Western Europe our NATO allies were introduced to a new defense strategy and in the Far East a similar move away from "massive retaliation" toward more "flexible response" introduced a whole new set of ideas stressing the need to raise the nuclear threshold but lower the point at which the United States would use conventional forces in limited wars. One of the innovators of this new national security strategy was General Maxwell D. Taylor, who had been Army Chief of Staff during part of Eisenhower's presidency but had retired in 1959 opposing of the New Look strategy. Upon his retirement, Taylor wrote a popular book expressing his indignation over a reliance on strategic nuclear weapons to deter conventional war and recommended the adoption of military posture which encompassed more usable forms of military force including tactical nuclear weapons.¹

As President Kennedy's personal military advisor and later again as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then Ambassador to South Vietnam, General Taylor was one of the principle actors in the policy process. Likewise,

¹Maxwell Taylor, The Uncertain Trumpet (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960), p. 24.

the new Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, was the administrator who converted the defense establishment to conform to the new strategy and was quick to see how it could be applied to policy in Southeast Asia. Given Kennedy's own expertise on Vietnam, these three decision makers formed the nucleus of a very persuasive, policy-making inner circle.¹

A number of world events added impetus to this new strategic view. Most analysts agreed that from Khrushchev's December 1960 speech, Kennedy perceived a direct challenge in the new Soviet preference for protracted conflict fought with neither nuclear weapons nor conventional forces -- the war of national liberation.² The Cuban invasion the following April seemed to indicate that the United States could not support a successful insurgency against a Communist regime and the ongoing Laotian crisis highlighted American shortcomings in supporting a counter-insurgency effort against Communist guerrillas. Thus, in the early days of the administration, Kennedy may have had an enlightened view of the diversity among Communist

¹W. W. Rostow and the President's brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, played a profound but inconsistent role.

²Kennedy's Vienna meeting with Khrushchev reinforced his feeling that the Soviets were committed to a hard-line attitude toward his administration

countries and discounted any monolithic quality, but the flow of events after Khrushchev's prophetic speech added to Soviet prestige as the recognized leader of the Communist world. As a pragmatic politician, Kennedy realized that he must arrest this trend. John Kenneth Galbraith later recalled his superior's concern:

I heard him say many times ... There are just so many concessions that one can make to the Communists in one year and survive politically. And I remember his saying we, we just can't ... have another defeat this year in Vietnam.¹

For the new President, in addition to the regional security concern of the previous administration, Vietnam quickly became one of the most important issues because of its perceived impact upon the superpower confrontation and its potentially damaging effect on Kennedy's political future.

Of course, in early April 1961, there was no debate on the efficacy of providing more military assistance to South Vietnam; the only suitable question being asked was "what kind and how much"? Upon the recommendations of numerous advisors, Kennedy authorized a special interagency task force headed by Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric. The policy proposals recommended

¹John Kenneth Galbraith quoted in National Broadcasting Company, Vietnam Hindsight, part I, Act. III, pp. 11-12 (broadcast 21 Dec. 1971).

by this task force because the nucleus of what eventually became formally known as "the Presidential Program for Vietnam." After convening on 24 April the task force which included representatives from both the State Department and the CIA, submitted their first compromise report three days later. After a preamble that recognized the situation as "critical but not hopeless," the report recommended maintaining policy continuity by the:

... use, and where appropriate extend, expedite or build upon the existing U.S. and Government of Viet-Nam (GYN) programs already underway in South Vietnam.¹

The report specified increases in the size of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), support for a larger South Vietnamese Army, the initiative of covert CIA sponsored actions in North Vietnam and the creation of a presidential task force to supervise the program. After a number of revisions stipulating larger force allocations based on the critical battlefield conditions in Laos, the report was submitted to the President, who only approved the original military proposals. Immediately, the Gilpatric task force was readying another report that proposed a larger commitment. At this point, the interagency consensus broke down.

¹Papers, vol. II, p. 35-37.

On 3 May the State Department submitted a draft report to the task force that deviated from the Defense Department in both substantive and structural matters. Unlike the Defense Department draft which advocated unilateral intervention as an alternative to "losing" South Vietnam to the Communists, the State Department draft only advocated that consideration be given a new bilateral treaty with South Vietnam. More importantly, rather than recommending an additional 3,200 advisors to train South Vietnamese troops as proposed by the Defense Department, the State Department thought this manpower commitment should be deferred for further study. On the final substantive point of disagreement, the State Department emphasized the political dimension of the problem.

Thus in giving priority emphasis to the need for internal security, we must not relax in our efforts to persuade Diem of the need for political, social and economic progress. If his efforts are inadequate in the field our overall objective could be seriously endangered and we might once more find ourselves in the position of shoring a leader who had lost support of his people.¹

This feeling within the State Department, that Diem should not be supported at all cost was the major source of continuing friction with the Defense Department. And these

¹Ibid., p. 53.

substantive differences over political-military considerations led to an alternate proposal for the bureaucratic structure to replace the Department of Defense's dominance in Vietnam policy. Instead of a presidential task force directed by a Deputy Secretary of Defense with a general as the executive officer, the State Department opted for a standard interagency working committee with one of its executives as the director. On 11 May the President formally accepted all the State Department recommendations and the draft proposal became NSAM 52.¹ Under the direction of a Foreign Service Officer, the newly instituted task force was instructed to study options for increasing troop commitments.

At the same time NSAM 52 was being accepted in Washington, Vice-President Johnson was sent to Southeast Asia to reassure Diem and other non-Communist leaders that, despite the decision to accept a neutral Laos, the United States could be counted on for support. The Johnson mission is not only important because of the recommendations that were made immediately after returning on 15 May, but also, for only a few years ahead, Lyndon Johnson

¹A National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) was a formal directive to the department head or other government administrator informing him of a presidential decision in national security affairs and usually requiring implementation or other action by the recipient.

would be the President receiving advice on Vietnam.¹ In the report Johnson argued for prompt American actions to show support for friendly governments in Southeast Asia. He recommended increased military and economic aid, and a more effective treaty arrangement to replace SEATO. But despite the setback and accompanying shock of the administration's willingness to accept a coalition government in Laos, Johnson concluded that American troops were neither desired by the Asian leaders nor immediately required. Moreover, the report clearly reflects his realization that a "fundamental decision" must soon be made whether or not the United States should be committed to a "major effort" in Southeast Asia. And this decision in Johnson's words:

... must be made with the knowledge that at some point we may be faced with the further decision of whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our efforts fail. We must remain master of this decision.²

The basic choices for United States policy on Vietnam have never been more clearly defined.

For the next several months many other estimates ranging from rather optimistic, submitted by the MAAG

¹For a provocative analysis of the lasting impression this trip had on Johnson, see Tom Wicker, JFK and LBJ (Baltimore: Penguin, William Morrow & Co., 1968).

²Papers, vol. II, p. 59.

chief who observed, "a spirit of renewed confidence beginning to permeate the people, the GVN and the Armed Forces," to the most pessimistic such as Theodore H. White's summary that "the situation gets worse almost week by week ... "¹ However, by October there was an interagency consensus that the military situation was critical and direct military intervention must be seriously considered. To make an assessment of the political and military feasibility of various options involving American troops, the Taylor-Rostow mission was authorized and sent to Southeast Asia. Upon the mission's return to Washington and much interagency divergence on evaluations and recommendations, on 8 November 1961 an end product memorandum was sent to the White House. Basically, the Secretary of Defense and his civilian and military executives recommended a commitment "to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism," and upholding that commitment "by the necessary military actions," including "the introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale."²

¹Ibid., p. 80.

²Ibid., pp. 108-109.

However, three days later there was a most curious bureaucratic occurrence: Secretary of Defense McNamara joined Secretary of State Rusk in submitting a joint memorandum to the President negating his previous recommendations. No American combat troops were advocated; only increased economic aid, equipment, and training would be offered, if "the Government of Viet-Nam is prepared to carry out an effective and total mobilization of its own resources, both material and human"¹ This memorandum, excluding the unequivocal American commitment to saving South Vietnam (which was contained in the McNamara-Rusk memorandum), was adopted as NSAM 111 by Kennedy. This McNamara reversal which served to preclude a major military intervention for the remainder of the Kennedy administration has not been sufficiently explained. The Secretary of Defense simply may have been convinced by the State Department officials who opposed intervention. Or, as the Pentagon Papers indicate and Daniel Ellsberg asserts,

...The apparent turnabout by the Secretary of Defense clearly represents a standard high-level bureaucratic device to prevent leaks that would burden the President with responsibility for rejecting certain proposals, or suggest that the

¹Papers, vol. II, pp. 110-16, for all the conditions specified for Diem.

measures actually were regarded by some advisors as inadequate.¹

Regardless of the true explanation for the bureaucratic maneuvering, the effect of the McNamara-Rusk memorandum was to offer the President an alternative policy to massive troop commitments.

Instead of being faced with policy choice between accepting or rejecting the Taylor-Rustow commitment to American military intervention " ... a shift from U.S. advice to limited partnership and working collaboration with the Vietnamese," the President had in the McNamara-Rusk memorandum a proposal that fulfilled two functions in the policy process. First, it allowed Kennedy to defer from initiating a radically different kind of policy to support South Vietnam. A policy that concentrated on military prescriptions and had less than the unanimous support of executive agencies, not to mention Congress and the populace. Secondly, it allowed the President to select a more feasible policy alternative which only represented an increase in the degree of support to Diem. The political aspects of the Vietnam problem were addressed by making increased American aid contingent upon

¹ Daniel Ellsberg, "Escalating in a Quagmire," (paper read at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1970, p. 13) quoted from Robert L. Gallucci, Neither Peace nor Honor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 24. Also *ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

reciprocal conditions being met by the Diem government.

In essence, the McNamara-Rusk memorandum not only provided Kennedy a most effective means of dodging a radical departure from previous policy on Vietnam but also provided the marginal changes that could be legitimized by Congressional approval and completely implemented. The resulting policy program, NSAM 111, called "First Phase of Vietnam Program," was a classical example of policy incrementalism derived from a complex set of factors including, but not limited to, the interagency controversy, reports on conditions in Vietnam, expectations of Congressional and public approval, and President Kennedy's perception of the problem and possible solutions.

The remainder of the "Vietnam story" during the Kennedy administration or how the policy was implemented is not essential to our purpose. It is significant that at the time of Kennedy's death, American forces in South Vietnam totaled about 16,000 or one-thirtieth of the apogee in troop strength reached by his successor. To sum up the Kennedy interlude, an insider aptly described the President's Vietnam policy:

... both to raise our commitment and to keep it limited. He neither permitted the war's escalation into a general war nor bargained away Vietnam's security at the conference table, despite being pressed along both lines by those impatient to win or withdraw. His strategy essentially was to avoid escalation, retreat, or a choice limited to those two, while seeking to

buy time - time to make policies and programs of both the American and Vietnamese governments more appealing to the villagers -- time to build an anti-guerrilla capability sufficient to convince the Communists that they could not seize the country militarily -- and time to put the Vietnamese themselves in a position to achieve the settlement only they could achieve by bringing terrorism under control.¹

In summary, Kennedy's Vietnam policy, in retrospect can justifiably be called an interlude between inattentive assistance and massive involvement.

FIRST DECISION: to Preserve Continuity

It remains the central objective of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported communist conspiracy. The test of all U.S. decisions and actions in this area should be the affectiveness of their contributions to this purpose.²

Two principal heads of state were killed less than a month apart, Diem preceeding President Kennedy in a palace coup. Thus, the first order of business was to provide continuity in United States-South Vietnam relations and demonstrate American confidence in the new

¹Theodore C. Sorenson, Kennedy (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 652.

²The introduction to NSAM 273, quoted in Lyndon B. Johnson, The Vantage Point (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), p. 45, also Papers, vol. III, p. 50

Saigon government. Toward this end, President Johnson, only three days after assuming the Presidency, announced his support of the previous Kennedy policy and allayed any concern about radical departures from previous policy initiatives. This pronouncement on 26 November 1963 was contained in NSAM 273, and it is important as Johnson commented, "not because it required any new actions but because it signaled our determination to persevere in the policies and actions in which we were already engaged."¹ The memorandum reflected the guarded optimism of the top policy makers who had perceived Diem and his regime as the major impediment to progress in Vietnam. It restated the goal of withdrawing most American advisors by 1965 and endorsed the provisional decisions reached at the Honolulu conference before Kennedy's death, calling for a concerted pacification effort in the MeKong Delta area.

This optimism was cut short by new developments. First, some critical reports appeared that seemed to undermine the prevalent assumption that pacification or winning the people's support was proceeding satisfactorily. The President had proof that Vietnamese officials had been reporting highly inflated figures to please their superiors

¹Johnson, p. 45.

and American advisors had been too reliant on Vietnamese reports in making their assessments. In February the Military Assistance Command Vietnam's (MACV) 1963 year-end report became available and substantiated the lack of progress. After a recounting of gloomy data showing down trends in most areas, the MACV assessment concluded that the military effort was dependent on political stability and could not succeed without effective Vietnamese political leadership. Unfortunately, effective leadership was not forthcoming.

Second new development, one that finally undermined the optimism of the new administration, was the ineptness of the Saigon government. Beginning with the Khanh coup in January, hopes for stability were thwarted in the Byzantine machinations of the Saigon political elite. In Washington the idea emerged that military victories would give the people confidence in their government and demonstrate the degree of efficacy necessary to stop the "revolving door" governments. Both Secretary McNamara and Assistant Secretary of State Rogers Hilsman, who would soon resign over policy disputes, stressed the need for military success and physical security as a prerequisite for political stability. But no military victories were forthcoming and more political turmoil followed. Well into 1965 civilian and military inter-

changed control of the central government. Commenting upon this political instability, Johnson observed, "The South Vietnamese often seemed to have a strong impulse toward political suicide."¹

Needless to say, the Vietcong were taking full advantage of the political situation to further undermine popular support for the government. In light of the new developments and enemy activity, once again in March 1964, a McNamara-Taylor mission visited Vietnam. And again the resulting report reaffirmed the necessity of an "independent, non-communist South Vietnam, free to accept assistance as required to maintain its security," within the context of the domino theory.² The present situation in Vietnam was decidedly contrary to American interests. The government was losing its effectiveness, the army was being beaten by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese supplied areas were increasing. To counteract this somber picture, McNamara ruled out committing ground troops or moving from an advisory to an active combat role because it would create "serious adverse psychological consequences ... " Although only a fear of the undesirable

¹Johnson, p. 64.

²Papers, vol. III, p. 3.

impact upon a weakened Saigon government is mentioned, the fear of a similar negative reaction to such an action on domestic politics during an election year was surely understood.

What was recommended and approved on 17 March as NSAM 288 launched a comprehensive program of twelve actions which did require more material assistance but did not deepen American involvement. Two recommendations dealt with contingencies to retaliate against North Vietnam at some future time; three were statements of support, e.g., "To make it clear that we fully support the Khanh government and are opposed to any further coups"; the remaining seven actions implied additional material assistance such as exchanging twenty-five aircraft for newer models, replacing armored personnel carriers, and trebling the fertilizer program.¹ The cost of the new program was approximately sixty million dollars to support a 50,000 man increase in South Vietnamese armed forces, a larger civil administrative cadre, and the hardware.

The implementation of NSAM 228 was the last program decision on Vietnam made in 1964. In June President

¹Papers, vol. III, p. 4.

Johnson changed the Country Team leadership in Saigon.¹ General Maxwell D. Taylor, for the second time, retired from the military to become the Ambassador to South Vietnam; U. Alexis Johnson, a highly esteemed career diplomat was appointed Taylor's deputy; and General William C. Westmoreland went from deputy to commander of all military forces in Vietnam. The new "first team" was knowledgeable on Vietnam policy but needed time to evaluate the on-going program and establish close associations with their counterparts in the South Vietnamese government. Although no new programs were initiated, all the policy makers were deeply involved in evaluating the current situation, and exploring options for new policy. For instance, John McNaughton wanted to convert American efforts from conventional military support to a program of counter-insurgency with heavy emphasis on economic and social reforms. But it was estimated that over 100,000 Green Berets and other American troops would be needed in Vietnam to administer the program.² Neither McNamara nor other top presidential

¹The Country Team is the organization headed by the Ambassador to coordinate and control all activities within the host country.

²On 3 Sept. 64, McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Office of International Affairs (ISA), submitted a "Plan of Action for South Vietnam" that included a proposal for a "U.S. military role in the pacification program inside South Vietnam -- e.g., large number of U.S. special forces, divisions of regular combat troops" Papers, vol. III, p. 557.

advisors were interested in recommending such a controversial new initiative to the President. Another option, the bombing of North Vietnam, was strongly recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but this was also judged as too radical a departure from previous policy and not warranted at present.¹ However, as time passed, more policy makers began to agree that until aid from the North was cut off, the situation in the South would not improve. The bombing contingency was not discarded. It was only temporarily pushed to the back burner and would soon be given a trial run.

SECOND DECISION: To Strike Back

The record is clear. I wanted the Congress to know what was being, or might have to be, undertaken. The resolution [Gulf of Tonkin Resolution] served that purpose.²

On 2 August 1964 in international waters, North Vietnamese gunboats fired on the Maddox, a destroyer patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin. Speculation surrounds the reason for the attack and also why the administration

¹On 2 Mar 64, the JCS requested, "Removal of restrictions for air and ground cross border operations," and recommended airstrikes against North Vietnam. Ibid., p. 120.

²Johnson, p. 119.

chose no stronger response than an undelivered note to Hanoi and a media release condemning the action. At night on 4 August another attack was launched on the Maddox and the C. Turner Joy, an escort destroyer. Again speculation on whether the attacks were real or imagined by crews anticipating combat still remains, but in Washington the President did not hesitate to act.¹ After conferring with congressional leaders, he ordered retaliatory air-strikes and sought general support from Congress for his Southeast Asia policy. The administration thought such popular support was necessary because of the potential danger of Chinese intervention. All possible military moves against North Vietnam were consistently evaluated to determine their provocative content for either Soviet or Chinese intervention. Johnson later cited Truman's failure to seek a similar mandate in 1950 as a mistake and recalls telling his chief policy makers that "I never wanted to receive any recommendation for action

¹The narrator of the section entitled "Military Pressures against North Vietnam, February 1964-January 1965," in the Pentagon Papers concludes that the Tonkin attacks were unprovoked and real. For an alternate analysis, see Joseph C. Goulden, Truth Is the First Casualty (New York: Rand McNally, 1969); Col. James A. Donovan, Militarism, USA (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

[concerning Vietnam] we might have to take unless it was accompanied by a proposal for assuring the backing of Congress."¹

There was little doubt that Congress would back the President in redressing this aggression by a small Communist country. There was little thought to turning the other cheek, that had been done on 2 August and national pride demanded more. The only question left unanswered was how much more. An exchange during the Senate floor debate is instructive:

Senator Cooper: ... Does the Senator consider that in enacting this resolution we are satisfying that requirement of Article IV of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty? In other words, are we now giving the President advance authority to take whatever action he may deem necessary respecting South Vietnam and its defense, or with respect to the defense of any other country included in the treaty?

Senator Fulbright: I think that is correct.

Senator Cooper: Then, looking ahead, if the President decided that it was necessary to use such force as could lead into war, we will give that authority by this resolution?

Senator Fulbright: That is the way I would interpret it. If a situation later developed in which we thought the approval should be withdrawn, it could be withdrawn by concurrent

¹Johnson, p. 113.

resolution. That is the reason for the third section.¹ One early dove, Senator Gaylord Nelson, wanted to amend the resolution so as to oppose any "extension of the present conflict," but Fulbright, to his later remorse, considered such a limitation superfluous.² The Senate voted 88 to 2 and the House voted 416 to 0 in favor of the resolution as submitted by the President.

At that time, it is clear that most Senators and all the Congressmen felt it was proper to send Hanoi a signal of national resolve to deter further hostile acts. Consequently, the threat of retaliation had to be open-ended to be credible. The President had been granted blanket authority to apply military sanctions against North Vietnam, and given adequate provocation, to commit the United States to a war in South Vietnam. No previous administration had sought nor been granted a similar mandate for military intervention in Southeast Asia. Politically, this was a decisive juncture, militarily, a parallel turning point would be reached a year later. The Tonkin strikes had been "limited but fitting." However, another restraint on American involvement had been broken.

¹Johnson, pp. 118-119 and Washington Post, 13 January 1972, p. 18.

²Kulb and Abel, p. 174.

THIRD DECISION: To Strike More Often

I now concluded that political life in the South would soon collapse unless the people there knew that the North was paying a price in its own territory for its aggression.¹

As the weeks passed and the presidential campaign gained momentum, apprehensions about a wider war in Vietnam receded. The Republican nominee became the "war" candidate and either by the incumbent's design or by the voter's perception of sharp distinctions where none existed, Johnson became the Democratic "peace" candidate. Although Johnson later denied running on a peace platform, his campaign rhetoric does not wholly support this contention. On 12 August before the American Bar Association, he made the following remarks:

Some say we should withdraw from South Viet-Nam But the United States cannot and must not and will not turn aside and allow the freedom of a brave people to be handed over to communist tyranny.

Some others are eager to enlarge the conflict. They call upon us to supply American boys to do the job that Asian boys should do. ... Moreover, such action would offer no solution at all to the real problem of Viet-Nam.²

¹Johnson, p. 132.

²Ibid., p. 575.

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ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLL FORT LEAVENWORTH KANS F/6 5/4
A COMPARATIVE POLICY-PROCESS APPROACH TO VIETNAM INTERVENTION.(U)
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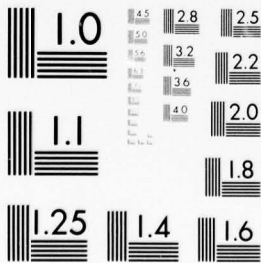
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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A

Given this type of equivocal pronouncements, Johnson should not be surprised when some of his supporters felt betrayed when the Vietnam denouncement unfolded after the election. If his intentions toward Vietnam were being misinterpreted by domestic audiences, it is reasonable to assume Hanoi was also having difficulty with Johnson's signals. At another point in the campaign, the President assured the country and any other interested listener, "Sometimes our folks get a little impatient. Sometimes they rattle their rockets some, and they bluff about their bombs."¹

Faced with intelligence reports showing that conditions in Vietnam alternated between "no improvement" and "deteriorating," Taylor, the new ambassador to South Vietnam, hoped to signal United States resolve to Hanoi in an unambiguous manner. Likewise, Admiral U. S. G. Sharp, Jr., Commander and Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) thought that the August 5 reprisal strikes "created a momentum which can lead to the attainment of our objectives in S.E. Asia," and the JCS also warned that "failure to resume and maintain a program of pressure through military actions ... could signal a lack of resolve."²

¹From a speech at Akron University on 21 October 1964, quoted in Tom Wicker, JFK and LBJ, p. 232

²Papers, vol. III, p. 190.

However, no new initiatives were taken against North Vietnam in 1964. The ostensible reason given for rejecting any intensified bombing campaign of the North was that the government of South Vietnam was too fragile to absorb the expected counter pressure from Hanoi (Interestingly, the exact opposite argument would be used to justify the bombing a year later). There was also an interagency consensus that the United States bargaining position was too weak to seek a negotiated settlement, and the use of combat troops was not wise. Moreover, the Vietnamese policy would not be divorced from politics. Inaction and rhetoric held much less risk than either escalation or negotiations. Any doubt Johnson may have had about the effectiveness of his campaign strategy was erased by his landslide victory in November.

To say no new initiatives were undertaken should not be construed as meaning that the policy process on Vietnam stood still for the remainder of 1964. Quite the opposite is true. There was a continued fervor but the emphasis was on planning, not implementation. One author has concluded that this period was crucial because "... the participants were planning for actions they expected the United States government to undertake," and "all believed in the fall of 1964 that the United States would

be very likely acting directly against North Viet-Nam and probably by January of 1965."¹ Whether this contention is accepted or not, it is evident that contingency planning during this period was based on the expectations of more airstrikes in the North and tended to limit the range of options generated by subsequent reviews of Vietnam policy.

The first such policy review was conducted in November 1964 in response to a Viet Cong mortar attack on the American air base at Bien Hoa. The action killed four Americans, destroyed five B-57's and damaged eight others. Although no action was taken against the North, the attack occurred two days before the polls opened. The President directed an interagency working group to meet and "to study 'immediately and intensively' the future courses of actions and alternatives open to the United States in Southeast Asia and to report as appropriate to a 'Principle Group' of NSC members."² Given this broad mandate, the group, chaired by Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy with high level staff members from all other interested agencies, produced only three options for further study and recommendation back to the NSC: Option A, "Continue

¹Gallucci, p. 41.

²Papers, vol. III, p. 210.

present policies," stipulated assistance for the Government of South Vietnam with operations in Laos and covert actions in North Vietnam and the United States participating in controlled reprisals in the North; Option B, "Fast/full squeeze" was a controlled, rapid escalation of systematic pressure on the North by the United States; and Option C, "Progressive squeeze-and-talk," was the same type bombing program envisioned above with a slower rate of escalation and opportunity to communicate with Hanoi.¹ The other options withheld negotiating until the United States' position had improved relative to Hanoi. In light of the working group's blanket authority for a thorough review and recommendations for future policy, the stated options seemed to fall within a narrow range of all the feasible actions open to the United States in the winter of 1964. Part of the reason for the narrowly structured options, is explained by one of the collective assumptions. At the offset, the reviewers focused their attention not on South Vietnam, but on the North. McNaughton was expressing a shared pessimism when he wrote, "progress inside SVN is important, but it is unlikely despite our best ideas and efforts."² Therefore, with this underlying

¹Ibid., pp. 601-606. John McNaughton authored the draft document and presented an analysis of Option "C."

²Ibid., p. 212.

perception about the near hopelessness of progress in the South, the group focused its attention on putting pressure on Hanoi. Another part of the reason, germane to our analysis, lies in the policy process itself and will be discussed later.

From the best available source, the policy review did not result in any immediate changes, but it did generate a consensus on what future options were most suitable for the United States.¹ After the working group made their report to the NSC and subsequent NSC deliberations, the principals of the NSC met to brief the President at a 1 December meeting. Johnson approved Option A, nothing more than continuing the present course, still hoping for improvement in South Vietnam, but expectations for actions against the North were also raised along the lines of Option C, gradual "squeeze" with the "talking" at a later date. Apparently this second phase would be initiated after some provocative action by the Viet Cong, then only after additional deliberations and a presidential decision. In other words, all the planning mechanism for expanding

¹The Pentagon Papers provide the most authoritative description of the deliberations; however, no NSAM was issued, the White House files are unavailable, and the narrator of the Pentagon Papers admits his conclusions are partly based on conjecture, see *ibid.*, p. 248.

American military involvement could shift into high gear, but the President made no commitment at this time to initiate future operations against North Vietnam.

With his own presidential mandate, Johnson could face the new year with personal confidence and renewed vigor. In contrast to the administration's political situation, South Vietnam held no expectations for improvements resulting from current American policy. Military preparations for the second phase of operations planned for since the November meeting were complete: three target packages for airstrikes against North Vietnam were available, Navy carriers and their aircraft crews were in a high state of readiness, the Air Force was ready, and destroyer patrols off the coast of North Vietnam were to resume on 3 February. Likely to provoke enemy action, the patrols were not begun because of concern over Soviet Premier Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. The stage was set for American military intervention, and the enemy was not slow in providing a provocative situation.

On 6 February the Viet Cong attacked an American advisor compound at Pleiku and a nearby Army helicopter base, killing nine and wounding over a hundred other Americans. Following an emergency NSC meeting and a conference call to the country team in Saigon and McGeorge Bundy, the President ordered retaliatory airstrikes. Supposedly Bundy told a news paperman that

"Pleikus are streetcars" indicating the administration had been primed to react to any provocative enemy action.¹ Three days later another streetcar appeared in the form of a similar attack on another American base at Qui Nhon. More Americans were killed and another series of airstrikes were ordered against the North with one significant change. This was part of a plan for "continuing action against North Vietnam," as the President explained in a cable to Ambassador Taylor, "with modifications up and down in tempo and scale in the light of our recommendations ... and our own continuing review of the situation."² The American air war against North Vietnam had begun. Although the second series of airstrikes were linked to actions in South Vietnam, it was not a single reprisal response, but an operation which led into the controversial Rolling Thunder operations, a continuing, systematic program of air raids on the North. By 13 February all the crucial decisions instituting the air raids against North Vietnam had been made. Within a span of a week, the United States had significantly escalated the war and greatly deepened her involvement.

¹Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention (New York: David McKay, 1969), p. 30. Bundy was in Vietnam on a fact finding visit and had personally seen the carnage left by the attack.

²Johnson, p. 129.

FOURTH DECISION: To an Open-ended Intervention

I have today ordered to Vietnam the Air Mobile Division and certain other forces which will raise our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested ... ¹

On 8 March 1965 the first of two Marine battalions stormed ashore in full battle dress near Danang to be greeted by some South Vietnamese officials and Army advisors with a sign proclaiming: "Welcome to the Gallant Marines." The presence of these troops in South Vietnam was a logical outgrowth of the decision to conduct a bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Since the Danang air base was providing extensive support for the air operation in both North and South Vietnam, General Westmoreland wanted to be sure it was not vulnerable to a Viet Cong attack, similar to one launched on the American base at Bien Hoa the previous November. Evidently the military need for this deployment was beyond reproach because there is no documentary evidence to indicate any resistance among the principal decision makers. Initially, Ambassador Taylor questioned the wisdom of guarding bases

¹Presidential press conference, 28 July 1965, as quoted in Johnson, p. 153.

with "whitefaced" troops and the negative effect such a move would have on Vietnamese army morale. More importantly he viewed the use of American troops in a security role as transcending the barrier that kept the United States from assuming a larger responsibility for the ground war in Southeast Asia.

Taylor's concern was not shared in Washington because at this time the Vietnam policy focus was on bringing pressure on North Vietnam through the bombing campaigns. Widening American involvement with ground combat, was not discussed as a suitable option. For example, McGeorge Bundy's memorandum to the President on 7 February 1965 made no reference to the use of ground troops. Subsequent discussions on what policy would be pursued also omitted any topic relating to the deployment of ground troops. Despite the fact that the air offensive was the result of a comprehensive review and the beginning of a new Vietnam policy phase, the possibility of a requirement for ground troops was not considered. The decision to send troops to secure an air base was not perceived as a major policy decision, but as a minor supporting contingency. However, there is reason to believe a different perception prevailed in Vietnam at Westmoreland's headquarters. On the day the Marines landed, the MACV Command History reads, "thus step one

in the buildup of forces had been taken and subsequent steps appeared to be assured."¹ This and other passages in the history show a tendency to view the deployment as the start of a sequential buildup of American forces. In addition, the debarked Marines soon discovered that they had neither the capability nor freedom of action to adequately secure the Danang air base. But once the barrier had been broken; thereafter, military consideration would increasingly provide cogent justification for the introduction of more troops and greater operational prerogatives.

Of course, the Washington policy makers could resist this growing pressure for ground troops as long as their present Vietnam policy was successful. Initially, Rolling Thunder seemed to be having a positive effect. The rate of ground combat activity sharply decreased for March, and the government forces were taking the initiative against the Viet Cong. After the departure of General Khanh in February, his successor, Premier Quat, demonstrated an ability to at least temporarily stabilize the government. As this period of relative quiescence

¹Papers, vol. III. p. 429

extended through spring, there was a feeling of cautious optimism in Washington, usually expressed as "a corner being turned." But Westmoreland's reports remained gloomy:

... if present trends continue, "six months from now the configuration of the ... [South Vietnamese forces] will essentially be a series of islands of strength clustered around district and province capitals clogged with large numbers of refugees in a generally subverted countryside; and the ... [South Vietnamese government] will be beset by 'end the war' groups openly advocating a negotiated settlement." " ... that we are headed toward a VC takeover," probably within a year.¹

The hiatus in enemy activity abruptly ended with the advent of the summer rainy season. The Viet Cong attacked the capital of Phuoc Long Province and scored other victories against the South Vietnamese army in May. As the Viet Cong summer offensive continued, a real fear developed that Communist successes in the central highland would split South Vietnam and lead to the establishment of a National Liberation Front government in the country's center. Military troubles were again compounded by political instability when the Quat government collapsed in mid-June to be replaced by an untested military junta. In June, General Westmoreland responded to the deteriorating military situation by requesting American and allied

¹ William C. Westmoreland, General USA, quoting himself in an early March report to Washington, from idem, A Soldier Reports (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 122.

reinforcements to take offensive actions designed to relieve the enemy pressure on the Vietnamese forces. Undoubtedly, the Johnson administration had again reached the point where a thorough policy review and new initiatives were required.

It was evident to all that the primary policy instrument, the Rolling Thunder operation, was not accomplishing the desired results. The bombing did not facilitate negotiations nor relieve the external pressure on the fragile South Vietnamese political system. Furthermore, Westmoreland and many others held little hope for its future success:

Thus far our air campaign to the North has been characterized by creeping escalation. This strategy has not influenced the will of Hanoi. The strategy has used air power inefficiently and expensively, and has achieved results far short of potential. In addition, a considerable and growing risk factor has been injected into the situation. The enemy now has a comprehensive air defense system under centralized control ... [that] will result in mounting casualties as the war goes on - perhaps more than we will be willing or even able to sustain, given the present limitations on targets.¹

He went on to recommend a more intense bombing effort to include "lucrative targets" near Hanoi and in Haiphong

¹Report from Westmoreland to President Johnson, final day of Manila Conference, 1966, quoted in Westmoreland, Reports, p. 122,

Harbor, but this policy option had already been discarded by the Washington decision makers. The prevailing consensus rejected this option because a drastic increase in the scope and scale of the bombing assumed too great a risk of direct Chinese intervention. Therefore, when the bombing campaign, which was a relatively easily managed program, failed to achieve the policy objective by itself, the Johnson administration was finally facing the basic decision that had been successfully avoided until now: was the United States going to seek a negotiated settlement in Vietnam and unilaterally withdraw under unfavorable circumstances or commit ground forces in support of its foreign policy objective?

Although principal members of the administration such as Under Secretary of State George Ball and Clark Clifford, then Chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, opted for a negotiated settlement. By the end of July, the President had decided that national interests were better served by further military intervention. Justifiably so, this was a most difficult decision for the administration as a whole, and personally for Johnson. He described it as "the most agonizing and the most painful duty of your President."¹

¹White House press conference, 28 July 1965, as quoted in Johnson, p. 153.

Nevertheless, before this basic policy decision to fully commit the United States to the ground war had been formally made, new interventionist initiatives were tried. In other words, while the debate over whether or not to become committed to an open-ended intervention was taking place, the existing policy was being evaluated and modified to accommodate the changing situation in Vietnam. Admittedly, these shifts in policy were hotly debated, grudgingly taken, and reversible; however, the policy steadily evolved toward a larger number of American troops being more actively involved in ground combat. Out of a myriad of policy proposals with troop strengths ranging from a few hundred conventional troops to options involving over one hundred thousand Green Berets, three successive strategies and concomitant policy for the commitment of ground forces were implemented -- security, enclave, and search and destroy. A discussion of the strategies will explain how the American ground commitment increased and demonstrate the incremental nature of the policy's changes.

First, as noted above, almost as an afterthought to the bombing program; the strategy of security was implemented by deploying Marine battalions to guard American air bases. This policy initiative was taken

when the policy makers were focusing their attention on North Vietnam and predicated on the optimistic view that American ground troops would not be needed other than in a security role. Thus, in June all nine of the United States battalions in Vietnam were primarily involved in base security. This strategy died a logical death when Rolling Thunder would not produce the desired humbling effect in the North Vietnamese. However, it did allay some of the anxiety associated with xenophobia and the ability of American forces to function effectively in an Asian setting.

The next strategy, the enclave approach, can best be described as a low risk, experimental policy. As part of the package of remedies for the worsening situation in South Vietnam, the President gave American ground units permission to get involved in the ground war. This decision during the National Security Council meeting on 1 and 2 April was a test for Marines to allow "their more active use," then evaluate their effectiveness against insurgents in a jungle environment.¹ As proposed by Ambassador Taylor as a low risk policy extension, the strategy required American troops to occupy coastal strong points

¹Johnson makes the distinction as opposed to an "unlimited combat role" that troops would later assume, Johnson, p. 141.

or enclaves, provide security for these areas, and be prepared to reinforce South Vietnamese forces within a fifty mile radius of the enclave. After the Honolulu conference in mid-April, it was decided that five enclaves would be established with a total of seventeen battalions. Ideally, the enclave strategy would deny the enemy certain crucial areas, thereby, avoiding defeat in the South while Rolling Thunder's punishment had more time to affect the North. In addition, it would release Vietnamese army units from security mission so they could actively pursue the enemy's main force units. Conversely, American troops would assume the less risky security role and maintain a "low profile." The strategy was based on the assumption that the South Vietnamese forces could defeat the Viet Cong.

Of course, not everyone accepted this assumption. Westmoreland believed the South Vietnamese army was already too ineffective to defeat the enemy and found the static role of defense for United States forces too restrictive. Events seemed to prove him right as the Viet Cong offensive gained momentum, but as critics would later indicate, the strategy was never properly implemented. The military strategy was only part of the program; internal development, both economic and political, was to be the most important measures, but they never received

the proper emphasis nor time. The program was not designed nor enough resources allocated to yield the quick results that were expected. The ostensibly passive nature of the strategy tactically yielded the military initiative to the Viet Cong, but the program's supporters allowed for this as long as the people were being won to the government's side. Winning battles was not seen as the vital factor. The protracted political struggle and outlasting the insurgent at the lowest possible level of sacrifice to the United States was the ultimate objective.

In reality, the enclave strategy was only an interim policy. The political turmoil and near military collapse in South Vietnam was a dismal situation. With the ineffectiveness of the Rolling Thunder bombing becoming more evident, the President wanted new initiatives which would reverse or at least retard the adverse flow of events. Within this crisis atmosphere, Westmoreland, with the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, continued to press for a freer hand to commit American forces and Third Country (Australia, Korea, etc.) in a more active combat role. This country's historical experience in war and the military precept, "The best defense is a good offense," added pressure for direct involvement. This pressure from within the administration, both from the military and others who wished to see more positive

results and from the public who saw we were "losing," was to be expected. Based on his own conviction that Vietnam was worth the cost, President Johnson gradually responded to the pressure by letting the enclave strategy be turned upside down. Behind this strategic reversal was the idea of going on the offense with American and Free World Forces, taking the war to the enemy and keeping him off-balance. With superior mobility and firepower, these forces would destroy and displace the Viet Cong's main force units. This would allow the South Vietnamese forces to assume the security and internal development mission, a role they were much more suited to perform than foreign troops. As Westmoreland explains, he envisioned a three-phase military program:

The first large contingent, I believed, would be enough to halt the swift disintegration of the South Vietnamese forces, blunt the main thrust of the Viet Cong offensive, and permit the construction of an American logistical base. Those objectives achieved, additional American troops, supplemented by contributions from other countries, would enable me to seize the initiative. In a third phase, the enemy would be worn down to the point where the South Vietnamese -- with their manpower mobilized and their forces retrained and re-equipped -- could gradually take over.¹

¹Westmoreland, "A Military War of Attrition," from W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell (eds.), The Lessons of Vietnam (New York: Crane, Russak & Co., 1977), p. 61

Combined with this proposal for a change in military strategy, was a subtle change in the policy objective -- the enemy was not only to be denied victory but also militarily defeated in the South. The policy of bombing pressure in the North and denial of victory in the South was superseded by a "win" policy in the South. The bombing would continue as a secondary policy instrument, but the primary emphasis would be placed on defeating the insurgents with American troops. Short of defeating the enemy, the United States could negotiate from a position of strength, if the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong came to realize further military action was futile. Thus, Westmoreland's strategy, dubbed "search and destroy," was a new and attractive policy proposal.¹

However, many principal policy makers questioned its efficacy. The chief advocate of the enclave strategy, Ambassador Taylor, expected no additional substantive improvements for the additional costs of switching to the more aggressive military strategy. He believed that only the South Vietnamese could save their country. The introduction of a large number of foreign troops would only

¹When this catch phrase acquired a negative connotation in the media, Westmoreland objected to its use, noting that his strategy also contained the tactical operations of "clearing" and "securing," but these two pacification oriented operations never received the prominence in execution as did the "search and destroy" operations. His strategy also contained the tactical operations of "clearing" and "securing," but these two pacification oriented operations never received the prominence in execution as did the "search and destroy" operations.

transfer the relationship between the United States and South Vietnam from one of partnership to one of American dominance. Thus, adding further cause for poor morale on the part of the South Vietnamese. George Ball, who Johnson described as his "devil's advocate," put no stock in military remedies stating that it was not reasonable to expect American military action to defeat the enemy or force him to negotiate. For him, the search and destroy strategy represented a greater cost without a corresponding benefit. Others saw a risk that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam would respond in kind, matching or surpassing the American force levels and get additional aid from the Soviet Union and China. Also, the threat of direct intervention by Chinese "volunteers" was a possibility.

It is not known what specific thoughts the President and his Secretary of Defense had on Westmoreland's total strategy, but they were prepared, in a piecemeal manner, to give the MACV commander the authority and troops necessary to initiate its implementation. In June Westmoreland was given permission to commit American ground forces anywhere in the country. With this new freedom to maneuver, American troops, in the same month, successfully penetrated a critical Viet Cong base area Northwest of Saigon. United States ground forces had proven their mettle in offensive operations. Thereafter,

the troops were liberated from their security role in the enclaves and entered the first phase of the new strategy. The next decision point centered on how many troops would be necessary to accommodate this phase. After much deliberation, the number of maneuver battalions, both United States and Third Country, was set at 44 and approved in mid-July. To enter the next phase, 24 battalions were initially requested with accompanying support troops, but this figure continued to be re-evaluated upward in response to intelligence estimates of increased enemy strength. By the end of June, it was clear that the enemy was much stronger than earlier estimates had indicated. Consequently, if this military strategy was to be the heart of their Vietnam policy, the administration had to respond with more troops.

In the summer of 1965, President Johnson committed the United States to a war in Southeast Asia. The air and naval actions before and even the implementation of the enclave strategy were seemingly reversible decisions. The commitment of 125,000 fighting men to defeating an Asian enemy was irreversible. The Vietnam policy process had ended in military intervention. From a foreign policy stipulating limited military assistance in the Eisenhower administration, the United States had incrementally progressed to fighting a war on behalf of South

Vietnam. Throughout the development of the policy, the political goal had remained remarkably consistent. In a 16 March 1964 memorandum, McNamara stated the most current United States policy objective, one which had presidential approval:

We seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam. We do not require that it serve as a Western base or as a member of a Western Alliance. South Vietnam must be free, however, to accept outside assistance as required to maintain security. This assistance should be able to take the form of economic and social measures but also the police and military help (necessary) to root out and control insurgent elements.¹

It was the agreed upon means designed to achieve the policy objective which inexorably moved toward a greater commitment of American military power. Ironically, the Vietnam policy process which resulted in intervention did not solve America's Vietnam problem. When the President made his dramatic July announcement over national television, he commented that the war might go on for seven or eight years. Likewise, General Westmoreland never intended to place a prescribed time limit on his strategy.² In

¹As quoted in Westmoreland, "American Goals in Vietnam," Thompson and Frizzell (eds.), The Lessons of Vietnam, p. 9.

²The Pentagon Papers narrator incorrectly interprets Westmoreland's phrasing and estimated he expected victory in 1967. Westmoreland actually hedged by putting no time limit on phase II and making phase III dependent on phase II. See Westmoreland, Reports, pp. 142-143.

other words, at that time that United States had committed itself to an open-ended military intervention -- a limited war of attrition. But the expectation of reaching the policy goals remained an uncertain reality.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLICY PROCESS

The chapter will explore the policy process which led to the decisions and policy described in the proceeding chapter. No attempt will be made to explain all the decisions leading to the administrations' respective policies on Vietnam, but the critical decisional points which determined shifts in direction or orientation toward intervention will be analysed. As previously stated, we are primarily interested in how both the Eisenhower and Johnson administrations formulated and legitimized their policy on Vietnam. After having successfully completed this task, in the last we will make some comparisons of the two administrations' policy processing and reach some tentative conclusions about their propensity for military intervention. This analytical orientation leads to a more rewarding comparison between the two administrations' Vietnam policies, both having a potential for intervention. The following analysis of the Eisenhower policy process will support and validate this approach as more representative of reality.

THE EISENHOWER POLICY IMAGE

Interagency Formulation

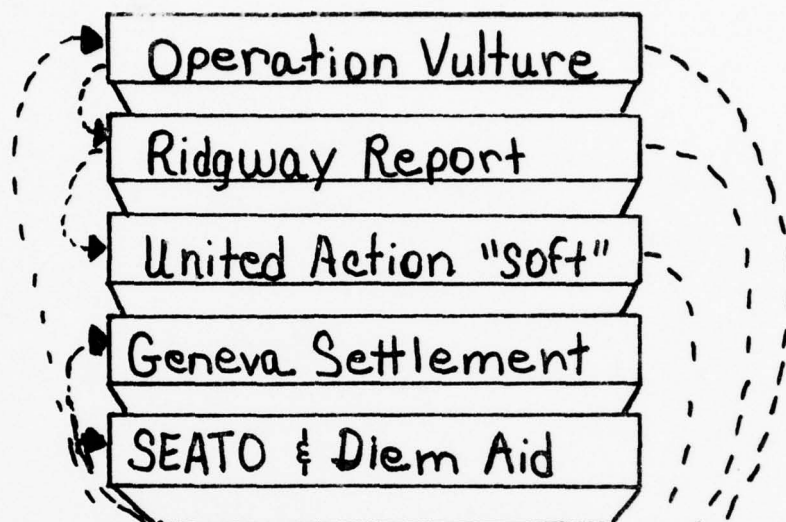
...for me to face my Maker and account for my actions, the thing I would be most humbly proud of was the fact that I fought against, and perhaps contributed to preventing, the carrying out of some harebrained tactical schemes which would have cost the lives of thousands of men. To that list of tragic accidents that fortunately never happened I would add the Indo-China intervention.¹

General Ridgway

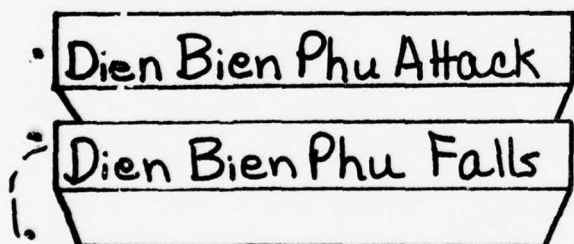
¹ Ridgway, p. 278.

1954 Indochina Crisis Policy Process

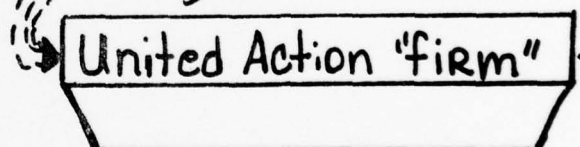
Formulation



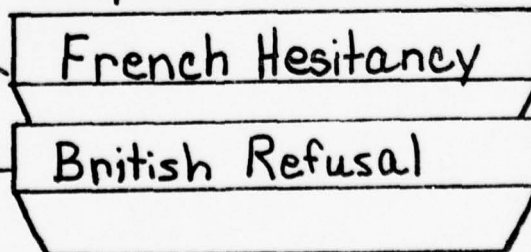
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Legitimation



Attempted Implementation



Although there was a general unanimity concerning the vital interest of Southeast Asia to the United States as expressed in the domino theory, there was no interagency or even intra-agency consensus on the type of intervention which should be pursued. Some kind of military intervention was thought necessary by the majority, but the bureaucratic conflict evolved around the "who" and "how" of applying decisive military force to the Indochina situation. Consequently, the sweep of events overtook the debate before a consensus could emerge, assuming there was a rational means of reconciling the differences. Therefore, the President was faced with a crisis which called for a decision on the use of military forces without a unanimous policy recommendation from his advisors.

Initially, the spokesmen for intervention limited to only naval and air forces possessed the preponderance of formal authority by virtue of their positions within the bureaucratic hierarchy. John Foster Dulles, a highly successfully financial lawyer and Republican foreign affairs savant before becoming Eisenhower's Secretary of State, was one of the most influential presidential advisors not only because of his position and relationship with the President but also because he had the ability to forge agreements. Sherman Adams, the President's "Chief of Staff," judged Dulles the most effective cabinet official at getting others to accept his point of view even when there was a divergence of opinion over basic policy. However, there were some definite

recognizable limits on Dulles' policy influence. First, he did not control foreign policy as some commentators would have us believe. Close research supports the view of one of Dulles' personal assistants, who observed, "He [Dulles] felt that the Secretary of State really was the President's lawyer for foreign affairs.... He thought the relationship was very (much) like a lawyer and client, and that his job was to advise and counsel, but basically on behalf of his client who ultimately had the authority and the power."¹ Secondly, considering the President's background, Dulles wisely choose not to challenge the available expertise in purely military areas and relied on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, particularly the Chairman, Admiral Arthur Radford for this policy dimension.

At the apex of the military pyramid whose base is the multitudes of men and women in uniform is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who is usually the most respected military member of the inner circle of presidential advisors. The strength of this link between the broader political process and the military depends to a great degree on the relationship between the chairman and his two civilian superiors, the Secretary of Defense and the President. Radford skillfully maintained the relationship by dominating Secretary of Defense

¹ Roderic L. O'Connor quoted in Douglas Kinnard. President Eisenhower and Strategy Management (University Press of Lexington, Kentucky: 1977), p. 18.

Wilson on strategic matters and by being empathetic toward the President's desire to cut defense spending through the New Look approach.¹ Allied with Dulles, who was willing to accept his military judgments, Radford was a formidable actor in defense politics.

However, directly below him in the military pyramid, his military credentials regarding national security were challenged by the other service chiefs. His past partisanship in pleading Navy causes and the dogmatic positions he assumed in policy deliberation hampered Radford's ability to maintain a consensus among the Joint Chief of Staff. Generally the Chiefs of Staff interpreted national security policy through the needs of their respective service, since organizational essence is preserved through the capability to perform mission essential tasks. Under the Eisenhower budgetary cuts, these capabilities in some cases were being drastically reduced. Even more clearly than the Chairman, the service chiefs have a multiple bureaucratic role as a joint member of a staff that advises on national security policy, as the corporate head of a worldwide military complex of personnel and facilities, and as a principle participant in the budgetary process.

¹ General Gavin who was the Assistant to the Army Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations and later Deputy Chief of Staff of Plans, observed, "Usually, and I know of no case to the contrary, he (Wilson) took the advice of the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, regardless of the views of the separate service Chiefs.", Idem, War and Peace in the Space Age (Harper & Brothers: New York, 1958), p. 168. For a similar critique see S. Adams, Kinnard, Ridgway and Taylor.

Although the first and third roles are important, they are generally complimentary to and defined by the second role, chief military officer of his service. As one retired general turned academician explains:

The service chief who has spent his entire adult life in the military service represents his agency in a manner in which no political appointee possibly could. He is the essence of the military professional and in this role usually considers himself apolitical. He is also the father of his service and there to protect it and its budget as best he can.¹

The implementation of a revised defense strategy and reallocation of resources put the primary reliance on airpower with naval and ground forces playing a secondary role even in a limited war situation. Not surprisingly, the interventionists found their strongest support within the Air Force. The Air Force Chief of Staff, Nathan F. Twining, was initially a staunch supporter of Admiral Radford in the National Security Council debates over Indochinese intervention. Moreover, just as the Navy's strategic concepts encompassed both the new emphasis on airpower and old need for conventional arms, its support for intervention was also spotty. When the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Robert B. Carney proposed "limited military intervention on 6 January 1954, Vice Admiral A.C. Davis, Director of the Office of Foreign Military Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense wrote:

¹ Kinnard, Eisenhower, p. 22.

....Involvement of the United States forces in the Indochina war should be avoided at all practical costs. If, then National Policy determines no other alternative, the United States should not be self-duped into believing the possibility of partial involvement - such as "Naval and Air units only." One cannot go over Niagara Falls in a barrel only slightly.¹

Not unexpectedly, the Army, in which support for the New Look grew softer with each proposed manpower and budget cut, directly opposed the Dulles-Radford plan for "limited" intervention. General Matthew B. Ridgway, the Army Chief of Staff, maintained his faith in the foot soldier as the decisive element in any combat environment, especially a military intervention in Asia. He was dismayed by what he believed to be the inordinate influence of Admiral Radford upon the Administration's civilian policy makers. Ridgway stated in his memoirs as a prescription for presumably past failings that "Their [civilian leader's] decisions, on which the fate of this nation depends, must be made only after full consideration has been given to the views of all the Joint Chiefs. Certianly they should never be made on the advice of one member only, no matter how closely his views may accord with their wishes, whether he be the Chairman or any other."² Indeed it was the "Chairman" within the military establishment who wished to "test the New Look" in Indochina against the counsel of the Army. However, Ridgway wisely

¹ Papers, Vol. I., p. 89.

² Ridgway, p. 292, (emphasis his).

marshalled the facts supporting his position and passed it up the chain of command to the President. In his words, the results were gratifying:

To a man of his military experience its (the report's) implications were immediately clear. The idea of intervening was abandoned, and it is my belief that the analysis which the Army made and presented to higher authority played a considerable, perhaps a decisive, part in persuading our government not to embark on that tragic adventure.¹

Based on the Pentagon Papers and other sources, "the idea of intervening" was not completely abandoned until 24 April when the British refused to participate in a joint Anglo-American air and naval intervention at Dien Bien Phu.²

Another undocumented source found Ridgway's facts decisive for fiscal reasons and commented that:

In 1954 General Ridgway had carefully programmed exactly what would be needed to fight the Vietnam and to help the French. The cost for one year would be an estimated \$3.5 billion. Eisenhower thereupon called in his economic advisors and his Secretary of the Treasury, George Humphrey "George, what would all this do to the budget?" he asked. Humphrey thought for a few moments and then gave a quick answer: "It'll mean a deficit Mr. President." In a way, thought one man present at the meeting, any idea of intervening in Indochina died at that moment.³

However, regardless of the exact timing or whether the Ridgway report was the decisive determinant in the decision

¹ Ibid., p. 277.

² Papers. Vol. I., pp. 92-105.

³ David Halberstam. p. 603.

not to intervene, its pervasive impact turned the policy makers from the consideration of only one option and avoided the "locking in" on only one course of action - unilateral military intervention.

CONGRESSIONAL LEGITIMATION

What is it we are going to fight for and to defend? I am a Senator and I do not know. The Democratic Senators on the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committee do not know.

Senator Wayne Morse, Republican
of Oregon - 5 April 1954

(The United States must act in Indochina) by putting our boys in.... regardless of allied support.... The aim of the United States is to hold Indochina without war involving the United States if we can.... The United States would have to replace (the French) if necessary The United States..... oppose outright surrender to the Communists.

Vice-President Richard M. Nixon¹
Cincinnati, Ohio - 20 April 1954

As the "Commander-in-Chief," presidents assume the authority for military intervention but usually seek popular endorsement for the employment of military forces. Usually some form of democratic approval has been secured before military action begins, in order to minimize the political risk. However, some chief executives have sought approval after the fact.²

¹ Both quotes in Pettit. pp. 59 and 62.

² The War Powers Act of 1973 does little, if any to change this situation as evidenced by President Gerald R. Ford's action to secure the recovery of the S.S. Mayaguez.

Certainly the rapidly deteriorating circumstances at Dien Bien Phu would have provided an immediate rationale for such drastic action, but there were more cogent reasons for not minimizing the need for congressional approval. First, we can assume that President Eisenhower had a very traditional perception of the relationship between the President and Congress. He expressed this view in his memoirs: "Part of my fundamental concept of the Presidency is that we have a constitutional government and only when there is a sudden, unforeseen emergency should the President put us into war without congressional action."¹ The Indochinese crisis was an emergency but hardly "unforeseen" with the agonizingly slow unfolding over two months before the French fortress collapsed. Secondly, and more importantly as pointed out by the Ridgway Report, air intervention may not have been sufficient to relieve the strong point, and Eisenhower would have been thrust into a position of committing ground troops of admitting defeat, an unforgiveable blow to Western prestige at this particular juncture of the cold war. It is unlikely that the latter course of action would have been selected and the introduction of ground forces would be more politically palatable to the public, if the initial venture already had the blessing of Congress. In this manner the administration could diffuse the risk in Congress. Without congressional sanction any action would have placed the entire risk of intervention on the President.

¹ Eisenhower: p. 345.

This domestic consideration brings us to the third and most frequently slighted reason why congressional approval was particularly crucial before launching an intervention in Southeast Asia. Most obvious but usually overlooked in analyses of crisis policy making is the concept of the "steady state," that is how relationships will be maintained after the foreign policy crisis has passed, and the day-to-day business of government is transacted. Executive decision-makers may overlook this basic fact of political life, but a Congress which is ignored or unduely slighted during periods of crisis management may become uncooperative or obstructionist toward other administration programs, both foreign and domestic. There is strong evidence that Eisenhower was particularly sensitive to the relationship between the Indochina crisis and other domestic issues. As a newly elected President there were a number of factors that influenced his administration's general approach to Congress: the Republicans held only a slim majority (eleven more seats in the House and only one in the Senate); they were unfamiliar with being a majority party and thus working with the President rather than being in opposition; and finally the diversity of political orientations among the Republican congressmen was great. Eisenhower had a "mandate for change" to be sure, but his power within the legislative branch of government was tenuous, and he knew it.¹

¹ Eisenhower, pp. 192-193

Furthermore his party was not always supportive. As an insider, Sherman Adams put the relationship between the President and his party in sharp focus:

The influential Republicans in Congress were, for the most part, conservatives who did nothing to help Eisenhower get the nomination nor did they accept the fact that he virtually saved their party from a deepening oblivion. They gave him only intermittent support and considerable opposition and personal aggravation. The Republican majority in Congress was so small during the first two years of the Eisenhower Administration that the President had to seek Democratic backing for his legislative programs and this added more strain on his relationship with the right of his own party.¹

Therefore it was extremely important that the Eisenhower administration did not alienate liberal support, both Democratic and Republican, because of some precipitous military action in a remote area of the world. Undoubtedly this domestic dimension to the cost versus benefit evaluation of the inherent risk of intervening played an important role in the decision-making process.

To further support this assertion we need only take note of the congressional floor debates on the defense budget for fiscal year 1955 which were beginning at a time when the fate of French garrison at Dien Bien Phu was almost beyond reversal. It may be recalled that the New Look strategy postulated a heavy reliance on nuclear airpower with a corresponding depreciation of conventional forces.

¹ Adams, p. 9.

The proposed defense budget reflected this priority with corresponding drastic cuts in Army manpower and money. In the floor debate in the Senate, the New Look budget was directly challenged by references to the situation in Indochina. Senator John Kennedy who had taken a keen interest in foreign policy in general and particularly Asian affairs, rhetorically asked whether or not the budget had been prepared when it was believed that French operations against the Vietminh were going to be successful. Earlier Senator Homer Ferguson had made a glowing opening presentation in support, stressing the long haul approach and the incorporation of new weapons technology in lieu of manpower. Now he admitted French failure had not been contemplated but denied this eventuality's relevance to the budget. Unhesitatingly, Kennedy explained the connection between the proposed cut of three Army Divisions and to the possible need for conventional forces to fight in Southeast Asia. Senator Albert Gore, observed that the New Look had already failed in its first serious crisis, the relief of Communist pressure on the French in Indochina. Shortly Senator Hubert Humphrey added his support to the Democratic opposition by declaring, "I wish to emphasize that the world situation is changing day by day. It does not do any good to talk about mass(sic) retaliation. It does not do any good to talk about something going to happen which is not going to happen. We have had our bluff called two or three times in the last month."¹

¹ Congressional Record, 83d Congress 2d Session, C. p. 8342.

In reply, the Republicans steadfastly clung to the President's credibility and expertise as a military leader and successfully diverted or blunted Democratic thrusts sufficiently to pass their budget. However, the challenge was serious enough to necessitate a vote on a Kennedy ammendment to retain sufficient Army strength to field nineteen division as opposed to the administration's plan for only seventeen divisions.¹ The amendment was easily defeated under the prevailing circumstances, but what if the President's military credentials had been sullied in an abortive intervention in Southeast Asia?

The question is not raised to explore hypothetical situations but to illustrate the political stakes that could be put in jeopardy by the wrong executive decision on Indochina. Any action which permanently damaged the necessary support for the passage of the New Look budget would have had severe repercussions throughout the Eisenhower administration and impaired its ability to move ahead on other domestic issues. Without the substantial reductions in land forces promised by the New Look, the administration could not hope to keep its campaign promises to balance the budget and to reduce taxes. In other words, the events at Dien Bien Phu were in one sense intimately tied to domestic issues through the defense budget. Consequently, the President could not afford to act contrary to the wishes of Congress on the former issue of intervention and still realistically expect to have his

¹ These debates are also succintly described in Kinnard, Eisenhower, pp. 34-36.

wished respected on the defense budget and other domestic, economic issues. Consequently, the administration wisely went searching for a Congressional consensus for military intervention as the crisis became more acute and would not intervene without congressional support.¹

Before the opening gamut to secure the support for any type of military assistance beyond material, the President and his advisors knew there would be stiff resistance.² For in support of the Navarre Plan and before the start of the siege at Dien Bien Phu, the administration had agreed to send forty B-26 bombers and two hundred Air Force personnel to maintain them. Although the American technicians were

¹ Another domestic issue which was competing for public attention at this time was the phenomenon of McCarthyism. Eisenhower was having extreme trouble in leading the right wing of his party to the extent that Adlai Stevenson bluntly called the Republican Party "half McCarthy and half Eisenhower." Through February and March McCarthy and the Army carried on a verbal battle of charges and counter-charges that finally resulted in publicly televised hearings, starting on 22 April 1954. Although I can find no evidence of the direct effect this domestic controversy, or McCarthyism in general, had on the decision-making process concerning Dien Bien Phu, it had an insidious and pervasive effect on the morale of government employees and posed a major distraction at all decision levels. For this aspect of the Eisenhower presidency see Peter Lyon, Eisenhower: Portrait of the Hero (Boston, 1974: Little, Brown & Co.); Herbert S. Parmet, Eisenhower and the American Crusades (New York, 1972: Macmillan).

² Joseph C. Harch's newspaper article stated, "The Administration's poll takers on Capitol Hill reported...that there were no more than five men at the most to be found in all of Congress who were positive and unequivocal in their approval of quick and decisive action." Christian Science Monitor, 29 April 1954, p. 1. Also see footnote #3, p. 124 for earlier public sentiment.

non-combatants and on limited loan, the announcement on 6 February 1954 was met with strong congressional criticism voicing the opinion that such actions were the forerunner of direct entry into the war. The Administration's failure to consult with anyone on the Armed Services or Foreign Relations Committees of either Chamber before making the personnel commitment to the French was especially irritating.¹ In an attempt to quell the mounting opinion that the United States was about to enter another "police action" comparable to the Korean War, the President at his 10 February news conference was obliged to declare, "... no one could be more bitterly opposed to ever getting involved in a hot war in that region than I am..."² Eisenhower later admitted that his administration was unsuccessful in gaining public support for this minimal intervention and cites strong political pressure in opposition to "any American participation whatsoever."³

Based on the precarious congressional environment and the strong nationalist-isolationist sentiment, the President's pledge to consult with Congress before embarking upon a military

¹ Eisenhower states that the decision was made "after consultation with the leaders of both houses of Congress", but this did little to mollify the congressmen on the committees directly concerned with such matters, especially the Democrats. Eisenhower, p. 341.

² D.D. Eisenhower, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: 1954, p. 250.

³ Eisenhower, p. 343. The Correctness of this perception is supported by a March Gallup Poll showing eighty-five percent of Americans opposed involvement in Indochina and Congressional mail reflected this public opinion. U.S. News & World Report, 7 May 1954, pp.25-26.

intervention in Indochina was the only logical course of action. Consequently, congressional approval became one of the substantive preconditions for military action before the crisis in northern Vietnam began. Although Eisenhower later wrote that he was aware of this fact, neither he, his principal advisors, nor the French acted on the assumption that Congressional approval for military intervention would be impossible or at the least difficult to obtain.¹

Optimism for French success prevailed.

These hopes were dashed with the first Vietminh onslaught at Dien Bien Phu in early March. By the end of the month the Administration was attempting to prepare Congress and the country for some type of possible military action.² If Operative Vulture was to be successful, it must be immediately implemented to destroy the men and material advantages of the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu. Again this would reinforce the administration's willingness to support the French with American military might.³ Since two aircraft carriers were on station, the option was immediately feasible,

¹ Interestingly, Eisenhower says he came to this conclusion early in 1954 and proceeds to discuss how other preconditions could be met (legal right and favorable Free World opinion), but neglects any discussion on Congress. Eisenhower, pp. 340-341.

² The administration desired "united action" without the use of American ground forces. Papers. Vol. I., p. 98.

³ Although unlikely, neither unilateral action nor the use of ground troops were ruled out. Gurtov, p. 83.

but for reasons discussed above it was entirely unsuitable without congressional approval. Therefore in the interest of the Administration's continued popular support no further military escalation was contemplated without congressional input.

After the 3 April Dulles-Radford meeting with Congressional leaders and the President's acceptance of stipulated constraints on the use of military force, a viable policy which incorporated the possibility of American intervention had been formulated and legitimized. The fact that the United States did not intervene is a question of policy substance not process. The fact that its implementation was conditional on other factors such as British partnership is not necessarily a sign of faculty policy development, quite the opposite.

Presidential Policy-Making Style

As our hearts summons our strength, our wisdom must direct it. There is, in world affairs, a steady course to be followed between an assertion of strength that is truculent and a confession of helplessness that is cowardly.

State of the Union message, 2 February 1953

Thus far we have taken the opportunity to look at the major streams of influence upon the decision to intervene or not to intervene in the battle of Dien Bien Phu, but no analysis would be complete without focusing our attention on the confluent point. An earlier President remarked that "the buck stops here" and a later President remarked, after the

abortive Bay of Pigs intervention, that failure was motherless but he, must take the responsibility for being its father. Being a career soldier, President Eisenhower was well aware of the military maxim, "a commander may delegate his authority but never the responsibility for his command," and as the Commander-in-Chief, he alone held the responsibility for ordering American military action in Southeast Asia. As Dulles later pointed out to the Senate, the framers of the Constitution had substituted "declare" for the original word "make" to provide the President with the authority to take prompt action in a crisis and left Congress the power to later deliberate on a declaration of war.¹ We know Eisenhower decided against intervention, but we need to gain a better insight into the presidential component of this decision. Again coming from a rational as opposed to a behavioral or bureaucratic approach, there are some very pragmatic reasons why Eisenhower as President chose not to apply military force in this situation. Some of the reasons in the network of influences have been discussed above, but now the relation of the man and his presidential role in the decision must be considered.

There are two divergent schools of thought on Eisenhower's presidential leadership style and effectiveness.

¹ United States Congress. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, 83d Congress 2d Session, 19 March and 14 April 1954. Statements of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Admiral Arthur Radford, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 22.

From the time of his administration until now one view is epitomized by the following:

After almost eight years in the White House, Dwight D. Eisenhower remains the most enigmatic phenomenon in the history of the American Presidency. Never has a popular leader who dominated so completely the national political scene affected so negligibly the essential historic processes of his time.¹

This conventional view characterizes Eisenhower as a popular but a weak national leader who was dependent on his subordinates for major decisions. His personal traits are said to have included a dislike for the "game of politics" and the pursuit of power. "Supported by an optimistic philosophy, unaware of man's propensities for evil and the tragic dilemmas of human existence, he had limited himself, by and large, to the enunciation of general principles, leaving the political task of their implementation to subordinates or to nobody in particular...." Thus Hans J. Morgenthau critically concludes, "the President, by divorcing his person and his office from the partisanship of politics, has transformed the character of politics itself... The result is national unity, paid for with the life-blood of the democratic process. For this is not the unity of a people who, after weighing the alternatives, have decided what they want. It is rather like a fog that makes us all brothers in blindness."² To be sure,

¹ Norman A. Graebner. "Eisenhower's Popular Leadership," *Current History*, October, 1960 reprinted in Eisenhower as President, Dean Albertson, ed. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1963), p. 147.

² Hans J. Morgenthau. "What the President and Mr. Dulles Don't Know," New Republic, (17 December 1956) p. 14-15.

there is a great variety in emphasis and substance within this critical perspective, but the theme of "weak" leadership is prevalent throughout.¹

In contrast, the other school of thought which is smaller and only recently been taken seriously by scholars depicts Eisenhower as a skilled politician and policy-maker. His Vice-President described him as "a far more complex and devious man than most people realized, and in the best sense of those words."² A few other insiders have also described him as a strong President.³ Other experts in the study of strategic policy-making have found him to be an active rather than a docile President. In the general field of national security one analyst concluded his book by stating:

In sum, contrary to the conventional picture of Eisenhower as a passive president, he emerges as a skilled practitioner of closed politics who dominated and frequently manipulated

¹ For instances, see Marquis Childs, Eisenhower: Captive Hero (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958); James D. Barber, The Presidential Character (New York: Prentice Hall, 1972); Emmet John Hughes, The Living Presidency (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geohegan, 1972); Richard E. Neustadt, Presidential Power (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960); George E. Reedy, The Twilight of the Presidency (New York: World, 1970); Richard H. Rovere, The Eisenhower Years (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956); and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Imperial Presidency (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

² Richard M. Nixon. Six Crisis (New York: Pyramid Books, 1968), p. 172.

³ See Arthur Larson. Eisenhower: The President Nobody Knew (New York: Scribner's, 1968); and Murray Kempton, "The Under-estimation of Dwight D. Eisenhower," Esquire, Sept, 1967.

a very powerful set of political and military appointees. In making and management of strategic policy he was a strong, active, and effective president.¹

More specifically, Bernard Brodie in his study found Eisenhower to be "...sensitive to the crucial importance of the political situation within Vietnam in determining the success of the military operations," and capable of keeping the interventionist including "Dulles under firm control."²

Another controversy of lesser importance but directly related to the first surrounds the functioning of the national security policy-making process within the Eisenhower administration. This analytical dispute focuses on how the Chief Executive used the National Security Council. Initially the Council had been created by Congress as a small committee of experts to advise the President on strategic policy.³ President Truman maintained a loosely organized Council and gave it an insignificant role in the production of policy. As a carry-over from his military general staff experience, Eisenhower greatly enhanced the role of the Council and made it the formal centerpiece in the security policy process.

¹ Kinnard. Eisenhower, pp. 135-136.

² Bernard Brodie. War and Politics (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 124-125.

³ National Security Act of 1947, as amended was the authorizing legislation. The President presided and the other statutory members were Vice President, Secretaries of State and Defense, and the Director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (later called the Office of Emergency Preparedness). The permanent advisors were the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of the CIA.

It was viewed as a "corporate body" that not only represented the various departmental views but was also expected to give collective advice on issues. The Council staff was greatly expanded; boards were established; and these interagency committees produced policy papers for Presidential approval and action by the proper governmental agencies.

Critics of the Eisenhower National Security Council system find the structure too centralized, overloaded, and independent of presidential guidance. Senator Henry Jackson's staff report by the subcommittee on National Policy machinery provided the classical critique and starting point for later scholarly criticism. Basing his critique on the assumption that the Council was the forum where decisions on policy were actually made, Jackson concluded that the decision-making process had become over institutionalized and usurped Presidential prerogative in this overly formalized decision arena.¹ In essence, this finding supported the major contention that Eisenhower was a weak President who delegated much of his authority on strategic matters to the National Security Council system. If this conclusion is totally accepted, the impact Eisenhower had on the crisis at Dien Bien Phu might be considered minimal, and we could focus our attention elsewhere for the critical factor.

However, there are some factual reasons for questioning

¹ Henry M. Jackson. (ed) The National Security Council: Jackson Subcommittee Papers on Policy-making at the Presidential Level (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 38-39

Senator Jackson's assumption. Insiders close to the decision-making process have either implied or directly stated that most of the important decisions were made by President Eisenhower in conference with only key advisors. For instance, John S.D. Eisenhower disclosed in an unpublished manuscript that his father thought of the National Security Council as a "debating society" and that the "real decisions were in the Oval Office with a small select group."¹ Also a recent work on the Eisenhower policy process found:

Finally, the importance to Eisenhower's decision-making process of the sessions in the President's office with ad hoc groups is clear. The formal National Security Council sessions were important for coordination and for developing teamwork, but the decisions were not generally talked out there. They had already been made in the President's office.²

Since the assumption, that decisions were made in National Security Council is highly questionable, thus President Eisenhower's input into the decision-making process is of unique importance rather than a rubber stamp for the conclusions of the National Security Council. Moreover, in the management of this particular crisis, dissonance within the Council over the type and effectiveness of military intervention precluded the development of a unanimous proposal without strong Presidential guidance. The President had to rely on his own expertise and instincts to select among the

¹ Kinnard. Eisenhower, p. 134

² Ibid., p. 65.

the options being advanced by the various factions. As we know the decision he made irrevocably doomed the French garrison and signaled a significant shift in United States policy toward Southeast Asia. Having substantiated the fact that President Eisenhower's personal calculus was important in this decision, we must now try to determine what moral, military, economic, and political factors shaped his final decision.¹ A further caution, this listing is a heuristic convenience and obviously not intended to represent a mental process nor are the categories mutually exclusive or exhaustive.

First, there are strong indications that the moral dimension of the crisis strongly affected the President's resoluteness for intervention. In his own summation, he noted, "there was an element of tragedy in an agreement that put great numbers of people under Communist domination," but was quick to add that he directed, "that aid to Indochina henceforth be given directly to the Associated States rather than through France." He found "much good" resulting from the struggle because, "it accelerated the independence...the French implemented in their desperation during the last days of conflict; this complete independence, with the removal of French troops, paved the way to an understanding among the free nations of Southeast Asia."

¹ What we are attempting here is called "factoring out" - that is dividing a policy problem into separate categories that can be independently analyzed. For an excellent explanation of how this analytical technique aids rationality see H.A. Simon, "The Architecture of Complexity," 106 Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, December, 1962

² Eisenhower, p. 374.

Undoubtedly when Eisenhower is using the collective "we" or the "United States" to explain non-intervention in terms of anti-colonialism, he is also voicing a strong personal norm or justification for not unilaterally committing military force on behalf of the colonial French. Eisenhower strongly believed that avoiding the taint of colonialism and advancing the anti-imperial causes would greatly enhance the United States' position as a leader of the Free World. Supposedly with France removed from the area, American assistance would no longer be subject to charges of aiding colonialism.

Furthermore in a personal note to General Alfred M. Gruenther, at the time, the Supreme Allied Commander, NATO, Eisenhower related his personal frustration with the French over this moral issue:

As you know, you and I started more than three years ago trying to convince the French that they could not win the Indochina war and particularly could not get real American support in that region unless they would unequivocally pledge independence to the Associated States upon the achievement of military victory...this Administration has been arguing that no Western power can go to Asia militarily, except as one of a concert of powers,¹ which concert must include local Asiatic peoples.

This statement seems to place the "blame" for the United States, or more specifically Eisenhower's inability to unilaterally intervene on the French failure to totally renounce colonialism in Southeast Asia. There is no reason to doubt that Eisenhower accepted the cold war moral dichotomy between good and evil. He had admonished Americans to

¹ Eisenhower, p. 352.

"hold the line of freedom" against "enslavement" and in the language of the cold war consensus declared "Freedom is pitted against slavery, lightness against the dark,"¹ However, it can be argued that Eisenhower had dropped the ideological stance that normatively sanctioned French actions in Indochina because they were fighting Communism and took a traditionally moralistic American position against European imperialism. Thus, "the evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones..."² and the past failures could be attributed to formerly blameless "freedom" fighters who in defeat became "colonialists." Public pronouncement notwithstanding, there is reason to believe that Eisenhower was never totally convinced that the French were not intent on colonial reconquest or neo-imperialism in Indochina. This Presidential attitude would help explain why he was not willing to go all the way to "hold the line of freedom." Before moving to the next presidential determinant, it is interesting to note that a decade later the Johnson Administration would be publicly speaking of Paris' attempt to "buck the trend toward independence," further depreciating France's prior role as an anti-Communist force in Southeast Asia.³

¹ See Dwight D. Eisenhower's first Presidential Address to the Congress, 2 February 1953, Ibid., pp. 312-325.

² Julius Ceasar, Act III, Scene 2.

³ Robert McNamara. Department of State Bulletin, 13 April 1964, p. 563.

Writing a post mortem in his memoir, Eisenhower flatly declared that military considerations ("Air strikes...would not have been effective," and "...loses would have been heavy ...") made "...unilateral American intervention nothing less than sheer folly," but he subsequently reassures us that "Had the circumstances lent themselves to a logical use of military force, the task of explaining to the American public the necessity for sacrifice would have been an acceptable one."¹ This Presidential resolve to intervene given the favorable political conditions is substantiated in the eleventh hour maneuvering in an attempt to salvage the French position. According to the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Anthony Eden, "Once President Eisenhower had been assured that the United Kingdom would participate in this declaration, he would be prepared to seek Congressional approval for intervention," "...United States naval aircraft would go into action at Dien Bien Phu on April 28."² If we accept the assumption that the President was prepared to intervene as part of a combined military force, then it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Eisenhower felt American forces alone could successfully

¹ Eisenhower, p. 373, in support of Radford plan see Bernard Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1967), p. 459. Based on later evidence of bombing effectiveness in Vietnam, he argues that saturation bombing and massive aerial resupply efforts would have saved the French garrison.

² Anthony Eden. Full Circle, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 119. This message was relayed through the French Ambassador, M. Massigli, on 25 April, 1954. Ibid.

relieve the pressure on the French fort. Militarily, it made little difference whether the American forces were committed to battle singularly or part of a "united action" task force. Britain was hard pressed to fight a counter-insurgency campaign in Malaya and maintain its forces in NATO, while the military forces other regional nations were capable of sending could only be described as tokenism. Thus it was a fact that the United States, along with the French would be doing the actual fighting regardless of the political arrangement. This reality counsels caution in giving military factors a high value in Eisenhower's decision not to intervene.¹ On the other hand, the military dimension of the Commander-in-Chief's rationale for a possible military intervention provides some interesting insights.

We are not privy to any information which indicates whether the President ever favorably considered the contention that airstrikes alone would remedy the French predicament and if undertaken, whether tactical nuclear bombs should be used.² Based on his faith in the New Look, Operation Vulture must have held at least a passing fascination; "there was some

¹ It is not intended here that Eisenhower formally "gamed" his decision, but is it reasonable to assume he weighted different factors in reaching his decision not to intervene. What is being said is that it would be hazardous to conclude that the Ridgway Report or other military reasons for not intervening were paramount.

² The availability of nuclear weapons was assumed and the reaction to their use was explored in NSC Action No. 1074-a, Papers, Vol., I, pp. 466-467 and 469-470.

merit in the argument that the psychological effect of an air strike would raise French and Vietnamese morale and improve, at least temporarily, the entire situation."¹ However, as a soldier he had witnessed the limits of aerial bombardment and would not depreciate the Army's position that massive troop commitments would be necessary for a successful American intervention. Nevertheless he continued to hold on to the unrealistic hope that the bulk of these troops would not be from the United States.

In an impassioned plea, on 4 April, designed to get Britain to join a Southeast Asian security grouping, Eisenhower wrote a personal letter to Sir Winsont Churchill in part saying, "The important thing is that the coalition must be strong and it must be willing to join the fight if necessary." He went on to write "I do not envisage the need of any appreciable ground forces on your or our part...." If not from the United States or Britain where would "appreciable ground forces" be found? Even at the end of April when the French fort was near collapse, he was insisting that "additional ground forces should come from Asiatic and European troops already in the region." At a time when it was politically impossible for the French to continue their present level of military action much less increase it, and no Asian military force was available to successfully oppose the Vietminh, Eisenhower's formula for "united action" had

¹ Eisenhower, p. 354.

the same flaw as the reason he, himself, opposed unilateral American intervention: "...if the United States were, unilaterally to permit its forces to be drawn into conflict in Indochina and in a succession of Asian wars, the end result would be to drain off our resources and to weaken our over-all defensive position."¹ Surely given the insignificant amount of allied assistance which could be reasonably expected, Eisenhower's position on the commitment of American forces lacks logical consistency. Either a unilateral or multilateral military action could still have had the foreseen dissipating effect on United States military strength.² The President's equivocal stand on the use of American ground troops cannot be explained by the tactical or strategic context of the crisis. As one military writer has observed:

It seems inarguable that solutions to national security problems should reflect the military factors involved in them. If they do not, the odds are high that we will find ourselves in trouble - involved in problems of overcommitment mistakes in timing, missed opportunities, and lack of orientation and objective in action and decision. The inevitable cost will be greater loss of life and greater risk of failure.³

¹ Eisenhower, pp. 347-353 and 354.

² Army estimate of seven divisions plus naval and air support is based on the assumption that the French withdraw; this eventuality was most likely because neither the French or American forces would subordinate or share command and control authority for military operations. NSC Action No. 1074-a, Papers, Vol., I. pp. 462-472.

³ General Adnrew J. Goodpaster. "The Role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the National Security Structure, Issues of National Security in the 1970's, Amos A. Jordan, Jr., ed. (New York: Praeger, 1967). p. 231.

What is arguable in this particular crisis situation, is the extent of realistic consideration the President gave to the military factors of a successful intervention. Fortunately, we need not dwell upon what might have happened if the United States had intervened because the economic and political factors turned Eisenhower away from taking a decisive stand for intervention.

Any analysis of how or if, economic factors affected Eisenhower's decisions during this period of crisis management is severely handicapped by the lack of substantive material. It is necessary to recall that in national security affairs, as in other issue areas, the President was faced with a problem of allocation. The classical economic model of "guns or butter" with all its real world vagaries gives every decision on national defense some economic manifestations. For a chief executive to be guided by Adam Smith's declaration in Book IV of The Wealth of Nations, "defense is of much more importance than opulence" is to court disaster at the election booth for fiscal irresponsibility. All modern presidents have sought to achieve sufficient defense without crippling the economy and Eisenhower was no exception:

Our problem is to achieve adequate military strength within the limits of an endurable strain on our economy. To amass military power without regard to our economic capacity would be to defend ourselves against one kind of disaster by inviting another.¹

¹ The 1953 State of the Union Message.

Even after leaving office he described this economic aspect of defense as "...the great and central security problem: 'How to keep the military, moral, and economic strength of the nation adequate at all times' ..."¹

For Eisenhower the problem of fiscal responsibility was compounded by the continuation of the Cold War. In light of past national experience, it was extremely difficult for Americans to accept an international climate which could not be described as peace or war. There was considerable resistance to the Eisenhower administration's "long haul" approach. On one side stood a small but vociferous minority who wanted to spare no expense to prepare for imminent war. On the other side there were those who thought the end of the Korean War signaled a return to a "business as usual" peace. As Eisenhower recalls:

When the Korean Armistic was signed only a few months after I entered the Presidency, I was urgently advised that the military budget be promptly reduced to what was called "peace-time" proportions. One prominent senator, anticipating the war's end argued long and bitterly for an immediate cutback in military costs to sixty to seventy percent. He believed that the economy demanded such a cut and predicted that if this was not accomplished at once the Republicans would be repudiated in the 1953 election.²

¹ Eisenhower. "The Central Role of the President in the Conduct of Security Affairs," in Issues of National Security in the 1970's, Jordon, ed., p. 218.

² Eisenhower. "The Central Role of the President in the Conduct of Security Affairs," p. 211.

In light of the fact that his campaign promises included a balanced budget and tax reduction, the problem of maintaining an adequate level of military spending was no easy task. Eisenhower continuously struggled to maintain both an Executive and Congressional consensus on the proper level of military spending. Overspending with a Democratic Congress became more of a threat to his economic objectives than the comparative frugality of his own party.¹ As previously noted, the New Look strategy was the security policy designed to accomplish both the military and economic goals set by the administration.

As a military man turned politician, macroeconomics was not one of Eisenhower's fortes. To compensate for this weakness, the President had selected a most able administrator from the business world, Geogre Magoffin Humphrey. As the United States Treasurer, Humphrey approached his new position with a "passion for domestic economy and dispassion toward foreign affairs."² Being attuned to the President's fiscal viewpoint, "George Humphrey was correctly reported at that time to be standing guard over the public purse and opposing many of these executive programs...."³ The President firmly

¹ As he puts it, "...between the Scylla of a deep deficit and the Charybdis of an inadequate military budget, we had to make a start without encountering either," Eisenhower, Mandate, p. 131.

² Emmet Hughes, The Ordeal of Power (New York: Atheneum, 1963), p. 72.

³ Adams, p. 407.

believed that "Economic strength is a basic requirement for successful military operations..." and Humphrey became the executive watchdog for checking defense spending.¹ In line with his priorities, Eisenhower added the Secretary of Treasurer to the National Security Council as a regular member. One outside consultant to the Council commented, "I'll go so far as to say that by all odds at the meetings of the National Security Council that I attended, except for the President, Mr. Humphrey's was the strongest personality, and had the strongest influence."² One analyst found Secretary Humphrey's influence pervasive: "Because he controlled the monetary and fiscal policies of the government, he was to set the pace for foreign and defense as well as domestic policies."³ And another writer found Humphrey's influence with the President harmful because it curtailed defense spending:

President Eisenhower would not take chances with the Nation's security. Where all else failed, the defense budget is defended against critical attack from both directions by appeal to his authority... Yet even if Eisenhower is a reliable expert on the military side of the balance, no one has suggested he is an authority on the economic side... he has relied on Secretary Humphrey. The result is that he has greatly overestimated the weight of the considerations that oppose defense spending and other government program.⁴

¹ Eisenhower. "Role of President...", p. 208.

² Quoted in Kinnard, Eisenhower, p. 20.

³ Marquis Childs. Eisenhower Captive Here (New York; Harcourt Brace, 1958), p. 168.

⁴ James Tobin. "The Eisenhower Economy and National Security: Defense Dollars and Doctrine," Yale Review, March, 1958, p. 333. Tobin further states that Eisenhower's fears were an increased national debt, long-run effects of large government budgets high tax rates on the productivity of the economy, and inflation, p. 327.

Although we would probably be in error to accept the proposition that Humphrey's conservative economic influence dominated the President's thinking on national security, we can safely establish that the Secretary of the Treasury was an articulate and highly influential spokesman for economic restraint in national defense.¹

Regarding the crisis at Dien Bien Phu, Secretary Humphrey vehemently opposed any prolonged military intervention, especially the risk involved in committing costly ground forces. Being an ardent supporter of the New Look's emphasis on more cost effective nuclear airpower, Humphrey could not be expected to support any option which included ground combat. In addition to Halberstam's account of Humphrey's estimate of the cost of an Indochinese intervention, approximately a year earlier he is quoted in a cabinet meeting as saying, "To get real tax reduction you have to get Korea out of the way. And after that you have to go on and do something more - figure out a completely new military posture... We have to cut one-third out of the budget, and you can't do that just by eliminating waste. This means where ever necessary using a meat ax."²

¹ Sherman Adams voices this opinion and states that Eisenhower faulted Humphrey for drawing too many parallels between business and government and was "occasionally too impatient for fast action." See Adams, p. 56.

² E.J. Hughes, p. 72. It is also interesting to note that seventeen days after the French fort fell, Humphrey announced the goal of a \$5 billion cut from expenditures during the next fiscal year. See Arthur J. Downey, Conflict in Laos, (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 49.

Eisenhower acted on this advice and would have been reluctant to reorder his defense spending to support an intervention. Such a reshuffling of priorities away from expenditures on technologically advanced weapons in favor of conventional armed forces would have greatly retarded the implementation of the New Look strategy and hence the opportunity for defense savings. Based on the above discussion, not only were the consequences of an intervention perceived as having a detrimental effect on the administration's economic objectives, but also, this conclusion was brought forcefully to the President's attention by his Treasurer.

Turning to the political factors involved in the President's considerations on intervention, we will pay more attention to the political policy process used by Eisenhower rather than the substantive issues. The reason for this approach becomes clearer if we recall what some of the major issues were. Internationally, Eisenhower perceived a catastrophe for the West if Dien Bien Phu fell. Believing the domino theory, he thought that the only possible remedial action was to keep the first domino from toppling, by countering the applied Communist military force with a western counterforce. Moreover the French garrison was viewed as the critical place to begin applying such force. In the President's mind, delay meant that it would be more difficult and costly later. Again referring to Eisenhower's letter to Churchill:

...It is no solution simply to urge the French

to intensify their efforts. And if they do not see it through and Indochina passes into the hands of the Communists the ultimate effect on our and your global strategic position with the consequent shift in power ratios throughout Asia and the Pacific could be disastrous...

If I may refer again to history, we failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini, and Hitler by not acting in unity and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson?...¹

Certainly this plea for collective action invokes what may be classified as the Munich syndrome or a failure to confront aggression with force leads to further aggression. Whether this historic parallelism accurately reflected international reality is not important. What is important is that the domino theory as it is related to Southeast Asia was the guiding policy for the President. Furthermore, in light of the continued weakening of the French, some type of military intervention was the only suitable policy alternative consistent with this view.

But as it has been shown, there was no interagency agreement on the application of force most suitable to relieve the French fort. By the first part of April, the National Security Council basing its recommendation on the Ridgway Report, drastically revised its estimate of the force necessary to support intervention. They also advised that the United States intervene only as a member of a regional

¹ Eisenhower. Mandate, p. 347.

coalition that included Asian countries.¹ On the other hand, the Dulles-Radford endorsement of Operation Vulture provided another alternative for intervention that could not be disregarded. In addition, other divergent factors such as the morality of intervention, budget cuts, popular and Congressional support, and other national security programs all confounded the formulation of a unified executive policy on intervention. As Eisenhower later commented on the President's role: "Organization cannot make a genius out of a dunce; neither can it make decisions for its head. The Executive Department is not a legislature or a committee thereof. It is one man - with properly organized subordinates."²

However the President did expect the bureaucracy to present him with clear policy alternatives, and they were not forthcoming. Without a bureaucratic consensus, it was certain the organization would not make him a "genius" and he would not make himself a "dunce". Consequently, rather than make a decision on a specific option for or against intervention, he was unwilling to support any policy proposal that could not achieve legitimacy before he publicly endorsed it. In other words, Eisenhower would support any policy on Southeast

¹ "Special Committee Report on Southeast Asia - Part II," Papers, Vol. I., pp. 472-476. All these reports on Southeast Asia during this period are devoid of specific risk analysis methods of tactical employment, or alternatives not predicted on the use of force.

² Eisenhower. "Role of President...", p. 213.

Asia that the domestic political market would bear. Although generally recommending action and predicting dire consequences for inaction, he would not swing the weight of the Presidency directly behind one policy proposal until that option had been virtually guaranteed popular support. Now with this reason for analyzing the policy process in mind, let us take a closer look at how Eisenhower managed this crisis through the policy process.

The tactic or method Eisenhower used in developing a policy for this crisis situation can best be described as a policy "bottleneck." As a scholar of policy analysis explains:

On a superficial view of policy making, a bottleneck is nothing more than clear evidence of a breakdown in decision making. If something is running behind schedule, or something necessary to action is missing, or there is a congestion, we say a bottleneck exists. But since bottlenecks are inevitable for complex policy making, policy analysts have discovered how to use them to make the best of a less-than-ideal situation.¹

Whether we wish to describe the policy vicissitudes within the executive branch between 13 March (the start of the Vietminh siege at Dien Bien Phu), and 3 April (the Dulles-Radford meeting with Congressional leaders) as a "breakdown in decision making" is not as important as the fact that the Congressional meeting on the above date provided the President with a vital bottleneck in the policy process.

¹ See Charles E. Lindblom. The Policy-Making Process, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 26 or for a lengthy discussion of policy strategies see D. Braybrooke and C.E. Lindblom. A Strategy of Decision, (New York: Free Press, 1963).

Before the Congressional meeting, Eisenhower had played a passive role as a policy broker, identifying the problem in terms of the domino theory and formulating alternative courses of action. However, he had not given any executive guidance that would legitimized any one proposal as the President's proposed policy for solving the crisis in Indochina. While the 3 April meeting was arranged by the President, his absence put a respectable distance between the White House and the advocates of air intervention. Dulles and Radford's policy strategy apparently was to get the cooperation of the legislative leader to pass a joint Congressional resolution authorizing the President to use United States air naval power in Southeast Asia.¹ Had this resolution been passed, the President would have had domestic support for unilateral military action. For the Congressional bottleneck would have been cleared in favor of intervention and the besiegers would not have released their stranglehold on Dien Bien Phu on the singular basis of an American threat to use force.²

¹ Writers have alleged that Dulles of the resolution ready in his pocket but never showed it to the Congressional leaders. See Chalmers Roberts, op. cit.

² On 21 April 1954 General Giap is quoted by Franco Calamandrei in *Unita*, an Italian Communist party newspaper: "We know that the struggle will still be a hard one, but we are not afraid that American air power will provide a decisive factor in this battle. The basic error committed by the imperialists has been, once again, to neglect the effort of which a people fighting for its independence is capable." in Arthur J. Dommen, Conflict in Laos (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 44.

As a result of the meeting, Operation Vulture was no longer a suitable option, and a new strategy quickly evolved from the constraints put on an American intervention by the legislators. The day after the meeting Eisenhower concurred with the preconditions necessary to eliminate the Congressional bottleneck for an interventionist policy. Moreover Dulles and the other advocates for intervention were given clear executive guidance for the first time - meet the demands for a joint Congressional resolution on intervention to obtain Presidential sanction. In other words, the interventionist could focus their energies on breaking this particular policy impasse, knowing full well that there would be no other impediment to their policy's implementation. As the President put it, "Thus we could get to work."¹

Of course the "work" was never completed; the Congressional bottleneck became a policy block, an obstruction which could not be removed for the reasons previously discussed. Some analysts have concluded that the President's insistence on making prior Congressional approval the litmus test for intervention doomed any chance for military action to save the French garrison. In retrospect, this conclusion can hardly be disputed, but it is doubtful that this was Eisenhower's calculated intention. As Sherman Adams recalls he was anxious to share the risk of an intervention with allies and Congress:

¹ Eisenhower. Mandate, p. 347

Having avoided one total war with Red China the year before in Korea when he had United Nation support, he (Eisenhower) was in no mood to provoke another one in Indochina by going it alone in a military action without British and other Western Allies. He was also determined not to become involved militarily in any foreign conflict without the approval of Congress.¹

But as previously mentioned, Eisenhower abided by a traditional interpretation of the Constitution and believed that the decision to make war resides in the Congress.

On a personal level we may conclude that "while a civilian President tends to be awed by generals, a military President tends to be awed by senators," or Eisenhower was just "passing the buck" rather than attributing this deference to Congress in matters of military intervention to some lofty federalist ideal.² We do know that his creation of a Congressional bottleneck over Indochina was not an aberration or just a policy dodge in this instance. The following year he asked for and received Congressional approval to use military force if the Chinese attacked the off shore islands of Quimoy and Matsus in a situation similar to the Southeast Asian crisis.³ It may simply be that Eisenhower believed that

¹ Adams, p. 121

² Richard H. Rovere. "Public Law 4" from D. Albertson (ed.) Eisenhower as President, p. 70.

³ Ibid., pp. 70-71. Also for a concise account of how Eisenhower used this policy strategy to secure bipartisan Congressional support in other crisis see A.L. George and Richard Smoke, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 288-292.

in an open society martial decision which might lead to a great loss of American life and treasure should be honestly shared with the people through their elected representative.

Some say that we were brought to the verge of war. Of course, we were brought to the verge of war. The ability to get to the verge without getting into the war is the necessary art. If you cannot master it, you inevitably get into war. If you try to run away from it, if you are scared to go to the brink, you are lost.¹

The formulation of foreign policy is never a facile exercise, nor should it be when the result could be a military intervention. In this instance it is a moot point how close the Southeast Asian crisis brought the United States to war, or if the American response not to intervene was correct. Our purpose has been to explore what happened within an expanded context of how and why the United States did not resort to force to accomplish its political objectives. As an undeniable result, the Eisenhower Administration suffered a loss of global prestige with the cession of Northern Vietnam to a Communist government. In addition the domino theory was amended by redrawing the containment line between the North and South of Vietnam.

As we have seen, the policy process that produced this situation is much too complex to be described as "the ability to get to the verge without getting into war." No general deterrence theory or zero sum game analogy adequately portrays all the important variables which influenced the final outcome. Rather than a unitary actor resolute to go "to the verge of war," the Administration is better characterized as fragmented subgroups identified by thier preference for intervention or nonintervention. Neither the statesmen nor

¹ Dulles quoted in Adams, p. 118.

military men could reach a general agreement on the most suitable course of action then and make a unified recommendation to the President. Even if such a recommendation for intervention had been forthcoming, good judgment rather than fear would still have caused Eisenhower to hesitate. Domestic support for intervention could not be molded in Congress without international support and allied intervention was not seriously considered until it was too late to implement an agreement. Lack of foresight had placed the President in a circle of domestic and international political restraints which left little room for maneuver.

Nevertheless, Eisenhower could have ordered American military action if his personal convictions so dictated. This much seems clear. Who is in control during such a crisis is important. Not only brave leaders commit their countries to war, but also lesser men who would rather go "to the verge of war" and beyond than admit they were wrong or had miscalculated. It is interesting to note Eisenhower's response to a Senator's inquiry about the ignoble connotation attached to not helping the French. "Well, they have said that before," he replied. "They said it about the Democrats during the Chinese situation in the forties. And they said it about Stimson when the Japanese invaded Manchuria in the early thirties"¹ The sharp contrast between these historical precedents and the ones he had invoked earlier to

¹ Adams, p. 123.

convince Churchill that united action was imperative, illustrates a mental flexibility and more balanced perspective on world events than many of his Cold War contemporaries. President Eisenhower was prepared to take the responsibility for inaction and let history judge the appropriateness of his decision. To be sure, his response to the crisis of Dien Bien Phu could not be described in terms of a battlefiled type of courage. However, the act of exercising restraint when military force was available, but not a suitable substitute for statesmanship, was also a courageous choice. Eisenhower reflected the quandary that formed the taproot of his administration's ambivalence and lack of singular purpose on Southeast Asian intervention when at the end of April he soberly explained to reporters that the administration had been "trying to steer a course between the unobtainable and the unacceptable in Indochina."¹

¹

Quoted in A.L. George and Richard Smoke, p. 262

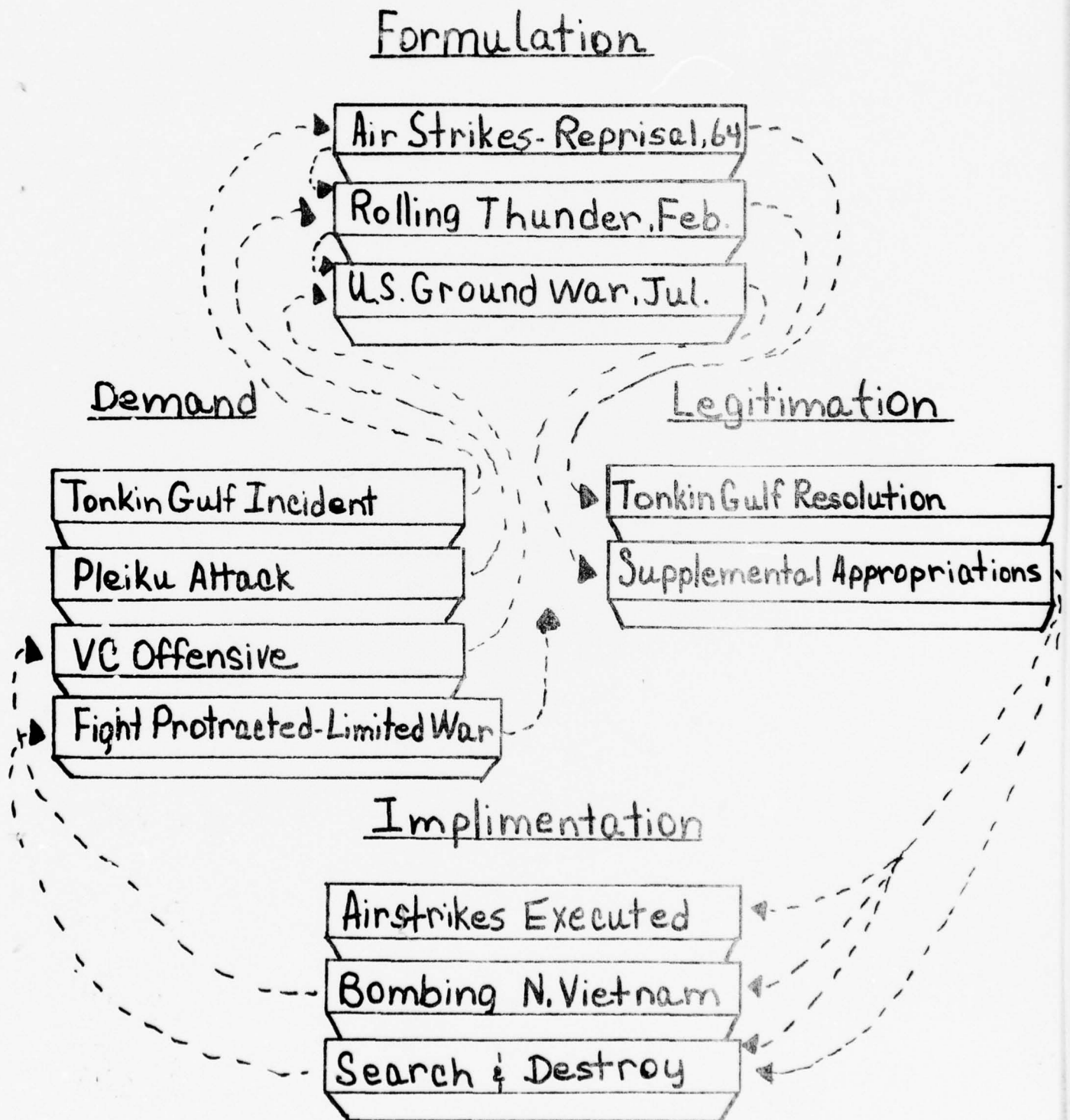
The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and the means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.¹

Scholars who wish to show that the "system worked" point to the bureaucratic consensus and the interagency unity present during all of the Johnson administration's decision which led to American intervention. This study agrees that such consensus was present but suggests that such bureaucratic conformity was dysfunctional and indicated a faulty processing of Vietnam policy. Again we are looking at key decisional points and how the policy inputs originated. In this respect, omissions or failures to contribute to policy making are also significant. An interagency consensus may be built upon the inability of one or more departments to actively enter the policy process and inject a divisive element. It may be blocked by another department's preeminence, the President, or by a number of other factors which create a shallow consensus.

Nor is it a disputable point that President Johnson legitimized his interventionist policy with the Congress. Clearly he requested and received Congressional approval for both the bombing and the introduction of troops. Here we are more interested in how he acquired a legislative mandate for an interventionist policy. And finally, President Johnson's leadership style must be evaluated from the

¹ Carl Von Clausewitz. *On War*, Michael Howard & Peter Paret, eds. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), bk. 1, Chapter 1, par 24, p. 87.

1965 Vietnam Intervention Process



perspective of its impact on the Vietnam policy process. In other words, we are referring to the sign post questions about the policy process discussed in the introduction in anticipation of the concluding chapter.

Interagency Formulation

By law and delegation of Presidential powers, the President's principal advisor in formulating foreign policy and his principal agent for conducting it is the Secretary of State, the first-ranking member of the Cabinet.¹

In one of the critical meetings only days before the President made his fateful announcement to the nation concerning the commitment of the first large increment of ground troops, Secretary of State Dean Rusk is quoted by the President, "If the Communist world finds out that we will not pursue our commitments to the end, I don't know where they will stay their hand."² It is evident from this and many other statements that the President's "principal foreign policy advisor and agent" identified the Vietnam problem with the larger problems of containing Communism throughout the world by military force if need be. However, being of the Cold War genre and having learnt the lessons of Munich do not entirely explain why the Secretary of State and his department became the silent partner of the Defense Department in the formulation of Vietnam policy.

¹ "How Foreign Policy is Made," Department of State, Publication 7707, General Foreign Policy Series 195, June 1971, p. 1

² Johnson, p. 147.

During the Kennedy years the policy inputs from the State and the Defense Department were still distinguishable. Although they both agreed on supporting South Vietnam, measurable differences as to the type and size of military assistance and the importance of military verses political considerations were evident. The case study highlighted this diversity in the discussion of the State Department's nonconcurrency with the Gilpatric Report for increased military aid and the bureaucratic struggle over the conduct of Vietnam policy. Men such as Averell Harriman, Roger Hilsman, and Michael Forrestal wished to see the military used but subordinated to a program of internal development. The problem was that they could gain no legitimate access to the policy process in the Johnson administration. Hilsman and Forrestal resigned and Harriman went from Under Secretary of State to a roving ambassadorship. Other State Department bureaucrats could not misinterpret the strong cue to fall in line and not oppose the trend toward reliance upon conventional military force.

Once the advocacy of restrained, unconventional warfare was blocked, the State Department was left with two alternatives: They could go along with the Defense Department or propose a negotiated settlement. Under Secretary of State George Ball consistently advocated the latter course of action in policy debates. In October 1964 Ball submitted a memorandum in which he included the option of a negotiated settlement as the best policy alternative because the United States could

not hope to win a protracted war in Asia.¹ Although this lengthy memorandum was logically constructed and cogently argued, Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and eventually Johnson all dismissed its major point from further consideration. In late July 1965 when the troop decision was about to be made, Ball once again surfaced his objections to fighting guerrillas with American troops. However by this time, Ball's was a lone voice in the wilderness. His role as gadfly was accepted by the principal decision makers. His oppositionist role was expected, as Dean Rusk later commented on his surordinate, "George started out as the devil's advocate and he wound up persuading himself."² His dissent was not supported within the State Department and the President and other policy makers considered him the loyal opposition within the inner circle.

Consequently with the elimination of this alternative the State Department was relegated to a supporting role with no independent voice in policy deliberations. As Vietnam policy took on more than the tinge of a military operation, Secretary Rusk's respect for the bureaucratic boundary between State and Defense precluded his intrusion on military matters. Likewise his subordinated were deterred from dissent by the Secretary's lack of support and desire not to take

¹ The memorandum was published by George Ball in an article entitled, "A Light That Failed," The Atlantic Monthly, (July, 1972): pp. 35-40.

² Quoted in Kalb and Abel, p. 200.

policy positions contrary to that of the President's. "In the State Department," Rusk is quoted as saying afterwards, "I was determined that no blue sky would show between the President and myself."¹ This may have been consistent with the execution of foreign policy as the President's agent, but as "The President's principal advisor in formulating foreign policy" on Vietnam, it was a liability that unnecessarily narrowed the scope of policy formulation. Thus the traditionally political and diplomatic inputs from the State Department were more frequently omitted from the deliberations on Vietnam. The more competitive, bureaucratic policy formulation process of the Kennedy administration was replaced by interagency consensus which diminished State's role in formulating the Vietnam policy, leaving it the exclusive domain of the Department of Defense.

Military Policy Processing

There is little controversy over the assumption that the Defense Department was the architect of Vietnam policy during the Johnson administration and that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was the chief designer. The military's role is not overlooked but greatly de-emphasized largely because of their subordinate role to the civilian policy makers. This tendency to play down the military's role in policy formulation is not only reinforced by the prevailing institutional view

¹ Ibid., p. 227

of how government should operate, but also by the writings of leading military figures who significantly influenced the Vietnam policy process but now wish to minimize their role for obvious reasons. However because this study's focus is on the more comparative aspects of the inventionist policy process and McNamara's role is already well known and somewhat unique, the study will focus on the military's input to policy formulation. The point is not to prove the toy hammer axiom: give a boy a toy hammer and he will find something to pound. In this instance the military did provide the hammer or capacity to intervene in Vietnam, but their influence on policymaking was much greater than just providing the material capability and military expertise as required by the civilians at the Defense Department. As a point of fact, the Joint Chief of Staff presented a united front in consistently arguing for the application of more conventional military force in Vietnam during both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Not only did the service chiefs maintain a more extreme position vis a vis the Secretary of Defense, and the Office of International Security Affairs (ISA) but also, until his departure, their chairman, Maxwell Taylor.

Although unanimity within the military community from 1964 on is curious, it can be explained. Certainly advocates of a more unconventional use of force such as Major General Edward G. Lansdale existed within the armed forces; however, their voices were successfully muted by the autocratic

nature of the military establishment and the concomitant negative incentives for opposing the organizational norm. It is also evident that since the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the advent of system analysis, the military had a shared goal in preventing a further erosion of their collective authority within the Department of Defense. The military was an embattled institution determined not to allow inter-service parochialism to further undermine collective prerogatives. On the more positive side, the new strategy of "flexible response" gave all the services a stake in augmenting their conventional capabilities. The Vietnam "threat" was a justification for all to gain a bigger piece of the budgetary pie. Not only did the Vietnam threat help sustain military justifications for increased spending under McNamara's new quantitative analysis, it also helped overcome a more basic resistance to military spending and larger forces. As one analyst of military affairs recently wrote:

In the West, the devotion of a steady high level of resources to defense does not rest as in the East, upon a mature understanding of the competitive structure of international life. Instead, desired capabilities have to be justified in terms of plausible specific threats.¹

Therefore, it is more understandable from a bureaucratic viewpoint why the military had a community interest in

¹ Colin S. Gray, "Force Planning, Political Guidance and The Decision to Fight," Military Review, 4 (April 1978):15

Vietnam and in maintaining an interservice policy consensus.

Moreover, the suppression of interservice parochialism played another more direct role in policy formulation. When General Earl Wheeler became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1964 and Taylor became the Ambassador to South Vietnam, the new chairman left little doubt that he sought a military solution to the Vietnam problem:

It is fashionable in some quarters to say that the problems in Southeast Asia are primarily political and economic rather than military. I do not agree. The essence of the problem in Vietnam is military.¹

Whether by design or otherwise the civilian decision makers came to accept the same conviction a year later. Not only did they accept the military context as advocated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff but they also accepted the programmatic formulation and implementation of the solution to the problem. The major feature of this program for American military intervention was that it avoided any overall evaluation of the problem and only changed the degree or kind of force being applied. After 1964 even negotiations were predicated on Hanoi's desire to avoid further bombing. Consequently this incrementally planned use of force practically eliminated the possibility of interservice policy conflict. For example, Westmoreland and the Army could afford to contain their criticism of the Air Force's bombing initiative and

¹ Quoted in Henry Bradon, Anatomy of Error: The Inside Story of the Asian War on the Atomic, 1954-1969 (Boston: Gambit Press, 1969), p. 28.

Taylor's enclave strategy because the ground troops were sure to get their turn. As long as the essence of the problem was military, there was no danger in agreeing to other military options. In fact once the Army had made the basic decision that ground troops should be used, it was to their advantage to actively support the other initial options which excluded their participation. The sooner these options were tried and found deficient, the sooner the Army could intervene.

Given the continued success of the Viet Cong, without a re-defining of the Vietnam problem or a moving away from a military solution, escalation was the only possible effect. In fact, at the periphery where the policy was being executed, Westmoreland later wrote that it was beyond his responsibility to go beyond the implementation of present policy. He only offered advice on how to save South Vietnam by military means. In his words, the General explains:

I was sharply conscious that I was a military man, charges not with making policy but with executing it. Yet if the National Security Council and the President deemed it in the interest of the United States to save South Vietnam from Communism, I bore the responsibility as the American military commander in Vietnam to advise from a military standpoint what had to be done to achieve that goal.¹

In other words, he viewed himself as an implementor and only offered advice in the policy formulation process when it was solicited. This advice, predicated on the policy goal of stopping the Communists or winning in the South, could

¹ Westmoreland. Reports, pp. 139-140.

only reinforce a policy of greater intervention. Westmoreland could be a successful field commander by recommending a means of winning the war. However, by narrowing his own responsibilities, he was not a policy maker. Although the policy or strategy was formulated from his advice, he had no obligation to consider a withdrawal. Thereby Westmoreland in particular, and the military in general, have sought to make a clear distinction between the offering of advice and the choice of an alternative for implementation which is left to their civilian superiors.

However, this distinction becomes blurred, if not irrelevant, when only interventionist options are being considered. In contradiction to Clausewitz's dictum that "It (war) has certainly a grammar of its own, but its logic is not peculiar to itself," the military truncated the grammar of intervention from the consideration of a logical political purpose.¹ By the summer of 1965 MACV and its Commander had the only game in town. If Johnson wanted to play, he had to trust Westmoreland's judgment. The fact that there seemed to be only one option was not the military's responsibility; however, the cost of pursuing this option was grossly underestimated by the military. The actual price of intervention was hidden within the context of a phased operation which gave the impression of a time dependent strategy, when in reality

¹ Carl Von Clausewitz. On War (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1966), Vol., III, p. 122.

it was an open-ended commitment to a limited war. It is true that Westmoreland made no prediction in 1965 when victory would be achieved, but in 1967 he later confirmed the fact that he had predicted that American withdrawals would start in late 1969 and that he and his policy was vindicated because they actually began earlier in August 1969. Rather than confirming the effectiveness of his strategy; however, the withdrawal signaled its demise. It had been superceded by "Vietnamization," a program quite distinct from Westmoreland's third phase which consisted of "mopping up the last of the main forces and the local guerrillas or pushing them across the border,..." The withdrawal was in response to domestic political pressure for withdrawal and had little to do with the enemy or the South Vietnamese's ability to protect themselves. This point still seemed to have alluded Westmoreland as he wrote in 1974, a year before the collapse of South Vietnam:

Yet it should be remembered that the original American goal was to preserve South Vietnam until such time as the South Vietnamese could do the job themselves. The final step took place. The Vietnam War permitted no battlefield victory in the classic sense, but an objective was established and its accomplishment spells success.¹

The final outcome of the Vietnam policy further illustrates the magnitude of the separation which existed between the grammar of intervention, and the logic upon which

¹ Westmoreland. "A Military War of Attrition", Thompson and Frizzell, eds., The Lessons of Vietnam, p. 69.

that intervention was ultimately based -- the United States could politically sustain a protracted, limited war of attrition in Southeast Asia against a determined indigenous enemy. The military over estimated their ability to fight a war in Vietnam in terms of material expended, dollars spent, and lives lost; there was no success. Platitudes about winning the battles but losing the war, or the stab-in-the-back themes should provide little solace. The uniformed services were in the vanguard of those advocating force, and even by Westmoreland's own criteria, after the South's quick collapse under a probing attack, the military effort must be judged a failure. Although very senior military decision makers have a responsibility to advise and implement the policies prescribed by their civilian superiors, they also have a responsibility to their Commander-in-Chief and Nation to critically evaluate options and an obligation to protect the citizens under their command from needless sacrifices. There is not an arbitrary line between things military and political in the foreign policy process. The defects in the Vietnam policy are more widely attributable to all concerned than either the military or civilian policy-makers would wish to admit.

Congressional Legitimation

Had not the Congress declared with only two dissenting votes that "The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international

peace and security in Southeast Asia?"
With this authoritative confirmation of
the essentiality of our mission, no senior
officer could in conscience harbor thoughts
of retreat.¹

Increasing American involvement in Vietnam was not a popular course of action, but it was done by a very popular President. Johnson had received almost unanimous Congressional support for a swift reprisal in response to the Tonkin Gulf incident on 4-5 August 1964. In reality he received much more. A precedent for direct United States military action had been established and Congress had given the President blanket approval for similar actions in the future. Later Congress would again be consulted and a large majority would support the sustained bombing of North Vietnam, the introduction of American ground units, and finally the commitment to fight the Vietnam war. During the 1964 Presidential election, Johnson was considered the peace candidate and after winning the greatest landslide victory in Presidential history, he still assiduously cultivated bipartisan support for all major decisions on Vietnam. The President sought to portray his decisions concerning intervention in Vietnam simply as an extension of the policies and commitments of his predecessors in the White House. He cultivated the support of the opposition party and gained public endorsements for his Vietnam policy from "Mr. Republican" -- General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

¹ Maxwell D. Taylor. Swords and Plowshares, p. 327.

The Johnson administration's success in keeping Vietnam policy "above politics" can be accurately gauged by the fact that there was no organized political opposition until after the 1968 Tet offensive.¹

Although President Johnson had an unchallenged mandate he did not wish to squander his political capital in an unpopular war. A Gallup Poll for 29 November 1964 tabulated that fifty percent of the respondents did not approve of the American efforts in Vietnam; a Lou Harris poll in January 1965 showed that twenty-three percent wished to "negotiate and get out," and another forty percent desired to "hold the line,"² Unlike many other modern Presidents, Johnson wished to make his mark on history as a great domestic President rather than a mover of world events. To accomplish the legislative feats necessary to make the "Great Society" a reality, he had to continue to be the master of consensus politics, a skill for which he had been unsurpassed in the Senate as Majority Leader. The elder statesman Averell Harriman summed up this Johnson ambition:

LBJ was great in domestic affairs. Harry Truman had programs, but none got through. Kennedy had no technique. FDR talked simply during the crisis, but didn't act enough later. Johnson went back past the New Frontier all the way to the New Deal. He loved FDR, and it was fantastic what he did. If it

¹ Herbert Y. Schandler. The Unmaking of a President, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 220.

² Quoted in Wicker, JFK and LBJ, p. 240.

hadn't been for ... Vietnam he'd have been the greatest President ever. Even so he'll still be remembered as great.¹

One of the tragic facts of the Vietnam intervention which deprived Johnson of reaching his full potential for domestic policy making may have been his consummate ability to organize a congressional consensus. Putting policy substance aside, the process of gaining legislative legitimation is functionally similar. One skilled in the art of influence can adroitly apply his talents to either issue area. In other words, whether it was an aid to education bill or an appropriation to support American divisions in Vietnam, Johnson knew how to mobilize support and insure favorable considerations for his policy program. Congress would be no impediment to the implementation of Presidential programs. There would be no Senate leader opposing Presidential initiatives as he himself had opposed the Dulles-Radford proposal for airstrikes in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu. However, policy content cannot be put aside. Obviously the damage done by precipitous passage of a poorly worded domestic bill is not comparable or as irrevocable as decisions on troop commitments.

Years before the Tonkin Gulf incident, Congress had been a willing partner in assisting South Vietnam. In February 1955 the Senate ratified the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) Treaty and Protocol by a vote of 82 to 1

¹ Quoted from Doris Kearns, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 251.

and by 1964 American presence in South Vietnam totaled 18,000 with Congressional knowledge and appropriations. Following Eisenhower's example and sharing his belief that "the advance support of Congress for anything that might prove to be necessary," Johnson asked Congress for its approval to retaliate after the Tonkin Gulk incident. He met with Congressional leaders and later commented, "...told them that I believed a congressional resolution of support for our entire position on Southeast Asia was necessary and would strengthen our hand. I said that we might be forced to further action, and that I did not want to go in unless Congress goes in with me."¹ Elsewhere, however, he discounted the resolution's utility observing "...the resolution was not necessary to do what we did."² Senator Fulbright, who was the resolutions floor manager seemed more attuned to this latter interpretation, but by all indications he and the other Congressmen allowed for the broader interpretation to include military intervention by Presidential prerogative.

There is no strong case for the suggestion that Congress was misled and did not understand the portent of their act. Although a few Congressmen voiced remarkably prophetic fears, their warnings went unheeded by all but two Senators who

¹ Lyndon Johnson as quoted in the Washington Post, 20 October 1971, p. 12.

² Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "Congress and the Making of American Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs Quarterly, (1 January, 1972), p. 101.

voted against the resolution. On the other hand, assertions claiming conscious Congressional approval of Vietnam intervention are more supportable by records and court actions which upheld the legality of the resolution. For example, a 1971 decision by the First Circuit Court ruled that Congressional action made lawful the course followed by the Executive up to the point where Congress may assert a conflicting claim of authority.¹ Congress did not do so until 1970 with the Cooper-Church amendment.

Support for involvement was solid through the mid-sixty's. For instance, an additional \$12 billion dollars for Vietnam were requested and received in 1966 in a House vote of 389 to 3 and Senate vote of 87 to 2. In 1967 another supplemental request for Vietnam of a like amount was passed by equally impressive majorities. Therefore a senior Senator's assessment of Congressional involvement while slightly overstated is certainly correct for the period covered by this study:

...the fact is, Congress is and has been involved up to its ears in the war in Southeast Asia. It has known what has been going on from the start and has given its approval in advance to almost everything that has occurred there. Far from being the innocent dupes of a conspiring executive, Congress has been wholly involved in the policy decisions concerning Vietnam during the entire span of American commitment there.²

¹ Cases cited in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. The Imperial Presidency (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), pp. 288-294.

² Senator Barry Goldwater, New York Times, 25 August 1971, p. 37.

Congressional participation in the Vietnam war was active and substantial, but we still need to further focus on how, or if, Congressional leaders affected the policy process after the Tonkin Gulf resolution.

President Johnson had weekly breakfasts with Congressional leaders and also held special meetings to inform them of critical decisions and elicit support. Congressional leaders had access to the decision making process at both critical junctures, the bombing campaign against North Vietnamese and the troop buildup in South Vietnam. Both House speaker McCormack and Senator Mansfield were present at the National Security Council meeting on 6 February 1966 to consider reprisal airstrikes in response to Viet Cong attacks on American installations. Senator Mansfield registered the only opposition to the attack. Johnson dismissed the Senator's objections and later recalled, "He (Mansfield) strongly opposed the idea of retaliation, but he proposed no alternative."¹ Congress favored the bombing initiative and after the Rolling Thunder campaign started Johnson received bipartisan support. "We should make an increased effort to win the war. And I think it could be won..." Senator Bourke B. Kickenlooper, (Republican from Iowa) continued, "I think you could suppress the guerrillas to a great extent... I would have no faith in a negotiated peace."²

¹ Johnson. Vantage Point, p. 125.

² Quoted by U.S. News & World Report, 15 February 1965 from Pettit, The Experts, p. 204.

Again before the final decision on troop commitments, the President conferred with Congressional leaders on 27 July 1965, one day before he made the decision public. In his book, Johnson begins a narrative of the meeting by stating:

I described for them the same five alternatives I believed were available to us. I said that in my opinion the real choice lay between alternatives four and five -- "to go the full congressional route now or "to give the congressional leadership the story now and the bill later.

He completed his opening remarks with the comment: "I don't think there is much chance of an early settlement, but others keep saying we have got to try, even though we have tried many times."¹ Then Rusk reviewed the conditions for negotiation; McNamara briefed on the "military elements of the proposed program and its likely costs"; and Henry Cabot Lodge, the new Ambassador to South Vietnam, according to Johnson, "made a strong and convincing case" against any other alternative to committing troops. Evidently Lodge's case was well put because, with the exception of Mike Mansfield, all the Congressional leaders agreed with the administration's assessment that United States troops were needed. Mansfield wanted a quick negotiated settlement, but "concluded by saying as a Senator and Majority leader he would support the President's position." By the end of the meeting, Johnson had made much progress toward his stated goal: "My object

¹ Johnson, p. 150.

is to get our government together, to get the allies together, and to get the country together, ...we were thinking of increasing our forces...and that I thought our total force would be doubled by November 1."¹ The administration had mobilized the support of the Congressional leaders, and the approval of the Americanization of the Vietnam war was assured.

For the purpose of understanding the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy process, it is important to place this meeting more accurately within one of the policy activity patterns. In his book, The Vantage Point, Johnson conveys the impression that the decision to commit troops had not been made, and that the Congressional leaders had access to the decision-making process. Consequently, they could have influenced the President's final decision. This apparently was the impression that Johnson also wished to impart to the Congressional participants during the meeting. If this were true, then Congress would have been capable of making an input to the formulation of Vietnam policy rather than entering the process later during legitimation. Congressional leaders would have had the potential of playing a more decisive role in the policy process. However, there is a substantial reason for doubting such an assumption. More likely, the administration orchestrated the facade of policy deliberation to further insure Congressional approval for a policy program of escalation which was already finalized.

¹ Johnson, p. 150.

The support for this assertion is found in the Pentagon

Papers:

On 17 July, McNamara was in Saigon with the new Ambassador, Mr. Lodge, when he received the cable from Vance telling him that the President had decided to proceed with the deployment of all 34 United States battalions then under consideration.

Upon his return from Vietnam, Secretary McNamara prepared a draft release to the press which stated that the total increase in United States forces with the latest approved add-ons would be about 100,000. That information was not given out.¹

The President made an additional decision not to call up the reserve forces during the intervening week, had the Congressional meeting on the 27th, and made the public announcement a day later. From the timing of this sequence of events it is evident that the Presidential decision was made and the policy formulation completed days before the Congressional meeting. Without getting into the more subjective behavioral aspects of whether a more assertive group of Congressmen could have entered the formulation network, certainly the administration intent was to deny them access on other than a pro forma basis.

To summarize the Congressional role, and by extension the role of the media and the general public, in the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy process, direct involvement began in the legitimation stage. (No attempt was made to assess the indirect influence of these factors on the principal decision makers during the policy formulation process).

¹ Papers, Vol., III, p. 476.

Congressional leaders and other "outside" opinion leaders did have access to the decision making process, but this access did not appear to have any impact on policy initiatives. At critical points in policy development such as the bombing campaign and troop commitments, the meager dissent that was voiced was dismissed. The administration successfully mobilized support for their policy programs and with each escalatory move from the retaliation for the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964 to the deployment of 200,000 Americans by the end of 1965, a national consensus of approval was maintained. This conclusion is in conflict with more pluralistic interpretations of the federal policy process. A year later, Senator Fulbright and an increasing number of Congressmen would become vocal opponents of the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, this discussion indicates that there is a serious gap between democratic theory and actual practice when applied to the "closed" decisions on intervention made in an "open" society.

Presidential Policy-Making Style

We ought not to do anything that might
be misunderstood by foreign countries.
He is the only President we have, and I
am going to support that President, because,¹
if I make him weaker I make America weaker.

President Johnson entered the White House with a distinct concept of the President's role in foreign policy.

¹ Lyndon Johnson as Senate Democratic Leader quoted by Eric F. Goldman, The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson, (New York: Dell, 1968 p. 489.

As the Democratic Majority Leader under a Republican Presidency, Johnson had espoused and practiced bipartisanship. He had supported the Presidential policy initiatives in foreign affairs because of a strong conviction that executive-made policy must have unquestionable domestic support to be effective in the international arena. Internal dissension would not allow the United States to deal with other countries especially adversaries from a position of strength. Now as the President, Johnson's conception of foreign policy making did not change, only his perspective. He expected his Congress and the people to grant him the same deference and prerogatives in international relations. He believed that the complex questions of foreign affairs should be left to the executive and not openly debated in public forums. In the past Johnson had observed that the public had a tendency to be ambivalent about foreign affairs and "go off on a jag in one crazy direction or another." One biographer commented:

The public, Johnson reasoned, would only hurt itself by knowing too much. Democracy demanded good results for the people, not big debates.¹

The world Johnson faced in the mid-sixties did not belie his concern for a free hand in international affairs. The Cold War realities of superpower confrontations from "brush fire" wars to strategic nuclear exchanges was ever present. Facing the new Kremlin leadership of Brezhnev and Kosygin, Johnson wanted to be certain that no illusions existed

¹ Doris Kearns, p. 284.

about his determination and fortitude to pursue American national interests. He wanted to be sure to send the Soviets correct signals and not repeat Kennedy's experience after Vienna of trying to change Khrushchev's perception of Presidential resolve. Without such strong leadership, the other elements of national power cannot be translated into a credible deterrent. Along these lines in November 1964 Johnson had confided to Henry Cabot Lodge, "I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went."¹

Since national security, was intimately tied to a worldwide containment policy, the United States could not afford to ignore potential Communist expansion in any region. As conditions in Europe became relatively static, the super-powers moved their conflict to Asia. On 16 October 1964, the Chinese exploded a nuclear device which further enhanced their growing power and prestige as a world power. With growing concern for this area of the world, the Johnson administration faced two large adversaries. Moreover, in Southeast Asia by early 1965 a lesser Communist power was on the verge of victory. North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front had all but defeated the South Vietnamese military forces and politically controlled most of the countryside. Consequently, the President had no suitable negotiating position short of withdrawal leaving a Communist government in all of Vietnam. But this was not really a viable alternative or way

¹ Tom Wicker, p. 244.

out for Johnson. As one writer observes, "--steeped in and shaped by the Cold War era of American history, a devout believer in the 'domino theory' and the evil intentions of Communism--...he was not looking for a way out; he was looking for a way to win, or at least to get the terms he believed were necessary."¹ Negotiations do not create new outcomes but only formally recognize existing conditions. For the United States to seek a settlement under the prevailing position of weakness in 1965 would have admitted a policy failure dating back to at least 1954. Furthermore, the Johnson administration would have had to absorb the blame for the "loss" of Vietnam. A recent biographer has caught the essence of Johnson's dilemma:

... he had come so close that he "could see and almost touch (his) youthful dream of improving life for more people and in more ways than any other political leader, including FDR...I was determined to keep the war from shattering that dream," Johnson later said, "which meant I simply had no choice but to keep my foreign policy in the wings. I knew Congress as well as I know Lady Bird, and I knew that the day it exploded into a major debate on the war, that day would be the beginning of the end of the Great Society... I was determined to be leader of war and a leader of peace. I refused to let my critics push me into choosing one or the other. I wanted both, I believed in both, and I believed America had the resources to provide for both. After all, our country was built by pioneers who had a rifle in one hand to kill their enemies and an ax in the other to build their homes and provide for their families."²

¹ Tom Wicker, p. 245.

² Quoted from a conversation with Johnson by Doris Kearns, pp. 282-283.

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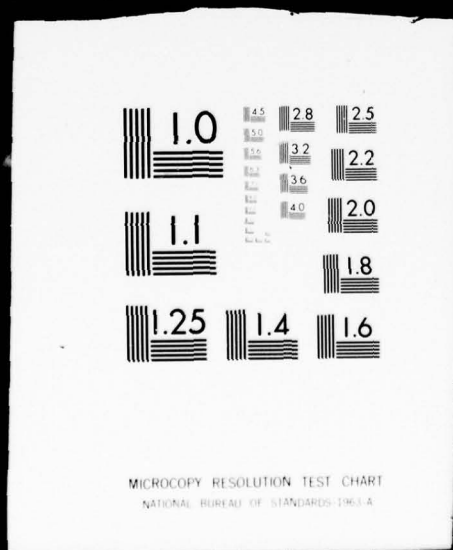
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Although it is impossible to properly weight all the factors which influenced the policy process or know why Johnson selected a specific course of action, it is evident that Vietnam policy was significantly affected by Johnson's perception of both international and domestic politics and their interrelationship. Internationally he wanted to portray his personal resolve and the nation's strength to the Soviets and the Chinese, but did not want to overreact by committing the country to a declared war in Vietnam with the potential for starting World War III. Domestically he was convinced that McCarthyism was dormant and not a dissipated political force; consequently, any unfavorable settlement of the Vietnam problem would touch off a "right-wing stampede" and ruin his aspirations for a great society. All these factors were translated into considerations which continually impacted upon the Vietnam policy process. Thus Johnson never could clearly articulate a policy goal to the military beyond generalities because then the generals would have had adequate justification for demanding the means to accomplish their specific objective. The President was constantly evaluating every initiative on Vietnam in light of its impact on other international and, even more importantly, domestic programs. Of course this was not a unique concern of only the Johnson Presidency. But the uncompromising approach of the desire to make both the policy programs complimentary and equally achievable was peculiar to Johnson's policy approach.

In one sense, as a domestically oriented President, he valued the Great Society over a full-scale commitment to the Vietnam policy goal, but his fear of a South Vietnamese collapse and its international ramifications plus the possible loss of his popular mandate kept him from setting any clear priority. In his desire to secure both goals, Johnson failed to accept the fact that a war could not be won against a determined enemy without making it the nation's first priority. As he perceived the relationship his domestic policy aspirations demanded that he continue the war to a successful conclusion but at a minimal cost in popular support.

The economic cost of the Vietnam commitment was never a major factor in the President's mind. Even when the war effort was being seriously challenged in 1967 Johnson's response to a question on how the war was affecting domestic programs is instructive: "The Cities are being used as an excuse by those who are against the war and the war is being used by the people who are against spending." He assured the interviewer, "We have the essentials for both if we have the will."¹ Johnson was not immediately concerned about the economic impact of deficit spending for both social programs and the Vietnamese war. For him it was a matter of will and pioneering spirit. Fiscal restraint and a balanced budget was part of a conservative mentality that was alien to Johnson's Keynesian-liberal approach. In the final

¹ Henry F. Graft, The Tuesday Cabinet (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 152.

analysis, he believed in having both guns and butter. Moreover the President was successful in getting the Congress to support his domestic programs while the defense budget increased approximately 17.6 billion dollars from 1964 to 1969. The eventual impact of deferred tax increases, the rapidly increasing public debt, and other insidious effects of fighting a war on credit would later appear to challenge the long run success of Johnson's programs. However this eventual outcome was not apparent to either the President or the country when the policy was put in motion in the mid-sixties.

In another manner Johnson's domestic orientation impacted on the Vietnam policy process. He lacked expertise in foreign affairs. Although he shared with the so-called foreign policy establishment, a world view containing Communism through strong American leadership, he lacked the knowledge of both substance and process necessary to be considered an astute policy maker. Being a Texan, not a member of the Eastern establishment, he was overly sensitive to any possible criticism from his more experienced advisors, but knew he must depend on their counsel and cultivate a working relationship with them. Johnson was not overawed by intellectualism and sometimes was overtly contemptuous of his advisors. Unlike domestic affairs, his orientation was more toward trying not to make serious mistakes rather than achieve great results. His policy approach in this sense was defensive and he sought a consensus among the established wisdom. One who does not

dare too much should not lose too much. Again this means of relieving his anxiety about foreign policy revealed a domestic orientation where the rules of the political game are agreed upon. In international relations neither the rules or stakes are constant and even the "experts" miscalculate the intentions of the other side. This environment was alien to Johnson's prior experience.

On the other hand, he had reason for confidence in his policy approach. The containment policy had validity throughout the world. When the United States had stood firm in Iran, Western Europe, South Korea, Berlin, and most recently in the Cuban missile crisis, American interests had been protected. Johnson had the Kennedy foreign policy team and they had proven their worth. He could rely on them to compensate for his lack of familiarity in developing foreign policy. In addition, the President had an inexhaustable source on information on Vietnam. "From that time (November 1964) until I left office," Johnson affirms, "I received a steady flow of comprehensive reports on all aspects of the Vietnam problem through both civilian and military channels," and after explaining other means available both governmental and private, he concludes, "The information I received was more complete and balanced than anyone outside the mainstream of official reporting could possibly realize."¹ Of course, we have already questioned how balanced the information was

¹ Johnson, p. 64.

based on the State Department's ineptness in offsetting the Pentagon's military bias and the resulting lack of effective socio-political analysis. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to accept Johnson's contention that he was well informed and advised.

However, Johnson's capacity to adequately define the problem and prescribe a remedy was severely impaired by his lack of operational ability in foreign policy, more specifically he lacked a sense of reality or what was possible and how it could be done. He was forced to rely on gross generalizations such as containment and the domino theory in the formulation of policy goals because he lacked the intimate and detailed command of the substance and process of foreign policy. In Congressional politics he had a sure knowledge of the relationship between means and end and carefully marshalled his support only for goals which were attainable. In foreign policy, he had no experience to guide him in practicing "the art of the possible." Johnson had no intuitive feel of how to appeal to the opposition or gain their cooperation in furthering his policy program. He accepted coercion as a method of gaining his policy objectives much more readily than he would have in the domestic arena, because he had no prior experience to gauge its effectiveness. Ironically, Johnson knew that threats were the least effective means of promoting a policy in the domestic arena, but he relied most heavily on force in international relations.

No amount of information could greatly alter the

President's course of action if his goal or solution to the Vietnam problem remained immovably based on his Cold War perceptions. He surrounded himself with people equally committed to the same mind set and tolerated little discord. Johnson could have replaced Secretary of State Rusk with Under Secretary, George Ball if he had desired a different policy input from the State Department. Rather Johnson continued to maintain a consensus among his inner circle, the policy bureaucracy, and Congress as he had done in his leadership role in Congressional politics. Increasingly though he found it impossible in the foreign policy arena to effectively extend or build a consensus with the other major participants. Johnson could find no means of convincing the Communists that they should cooperate with him on Vietnam. Conversely, he could not bring himself to modify his policy goals because he thought in terms of "appeasement" to Communist "aggression." His Vietnam policy was blocked because there was no common ground for compromise since his and the opposition's policy goals were mutually exclusive. "By treating the struggle in Vietnam as an exercise in bargaining," a recent Johnson biographer commented, "he sought to deny that it might exist somewhere beyond the healthy bounds of reasonable negotiations."¹ From this most basic miscalculation of the extent of the problem and thus the remedy required, came equally distorted estimates of the means necessary to

¹ Doris Kearns, p. 264.

formulate and implement an effective Vietnam policy.

Contrary to Daniel Ellsberg's thesis, all the major esculatory decisions were surrounded by a mood of guarded optimism. The President later claimed some reservations about the effectiveness of bombing the North to the bargaining table, but this judgment may have been tempered by subsequent events. The prevalent feeling was one of elated self-confidence after the decision to bomb was made. One highly regarded columnist has written:

Several officials who were close to Johnson at that time...recall the sheer ebullience of the moment. One of them had also served Kennedy and remembers the same sense of omnipotence in the White House in early 1961... (He said,) "We thought we had the golden touch." ¹ It was just that way with Johnson after Sixty-four.

After the President became convinced that the Rolling Thunder campaign was unable to accomplish its objective, rather than modify his policy goals, he decided to introduce ground troops in the South. As the narrator of the Pentagon Papers concludes:

Neither the President nor the Secretary of Defense is on record in 1965 with expectations as to the duration of the war or the impact of the 44 battalions. It looks as though they both were prepared for the moment to go along with General Westmoreland's predictions about the course of the war. ²

Although definite expectations and their associated times are impossible to precisely determine, it is known that

¹ Tom Wicker, p. 250.

² Papers, Vol., III, p. 484.

all concerned expected the 44 battalions to "insure that the VC/DRV cannot win in South Vietnam at their present level of commitment."¹ In the subsequent phases of Westmoreland's strategy, the enemy would not only be denied victory but would be defeated in the South. These observations suggest that President Johnson and his senior advisors shared a steadfast faith in the efficacy of the policy being formulated despite the gloomy reports and objections being raised by a few policymakers. No thought was given to re-examine the policy objectives or the assumption about the effectiveness of military force to solve the Vietnam problem.

One obvious place for such a policy evaluation followed the bombing campaign before American troops were actively committed to ground combat, but none was conducted. One analyst explains this omission by concluding, "Support for the decision to drop bombs did not follow from a perception of direct domestic pressure, but from the perceived link between the use of air power and the use of American troops; bombs were dropped as a necessary political prerequisite to the engagement of American troops."² Certainly some Presidential advisors particularly within the Army, made this connection between the two escalatory decisions, but there is no evidence that the President or Secretary of Defense made such a conscious linkage. However, the bombing was not done as a mere face-saving gesture. The President was not seriously contemplating

¹ Papers, Vol., III, p. 481

² Robert L. Gallucci, p. 53.

defeat or an unfavorable negotiated settlement. On 25 July 1965 Clark Clifford, then Chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board told Johnson:

I don't believe we can win in South Vietnam. If we send in 100,000 more men, the North Vietnamese will meet us. If North Vietnam runs out of men, the Chinese will send in volunteers. Russia and China don't intend for us to win the war.¹

The President replied he had similar concerns but would not "accept just any settlement as a cover-up for surrender."² Johnson was not prepared to entertain any serious discussions of a change in policy goals; only the means of accomplishing the objectives were debatable.

Another plausible explanation of how the policy process failed to provide other policy alternatives is found in Irving L. Janis's concept of groupthink. President Johnson, being a long standing practitioner of consensus building and without expertise in foreign policy making, would seem particularly vulnerable to "defective judgment that arises in cohesive groups -- the concurrence-seeking tendency, which fosters overoptimism, lack of vigilance, and solganistic thinking..."³ We have already examined some of the President's tendencies which could be symptomatic of groupthink. Mounting stress, uncritical acceptance of the

¹ Johnson, p. 148.

² Ibid., p. 148

³ Irving L. Janis. Victims of Groupthink (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), p. 13.

domino theory, the unanimity within the Tuesday Lunch Group, and other factors are explained by Janis to support the thesis that Johnson was a victim. Later in 1967 when McNamara tried to actively oppose Vietnam policy, Johnson responded with an analogy of a disloyal son from which the analyst concluded:

This line of thought strongly suggests that in his own mind Johnson regarded his in-group of policy advisors as a family and its leading dissident member as an irresponsible son who was sabotaging the family's interest.¹

Further, after the usual disclaimers about the tentative nature and insufficient proof of his findings, Janis advances this proposition: "Still, it is probable that if they were indulging in groupthink they were prevented from becoming fully aware of the futility of their ill-conceived escalation decisions and from correcting some of their most fallacious assumptions soon enough to reconsider the alternatives open to them."² Of course, the applicability of the groupthink concept to the Johnson administration's policy making is one of both value and degree. If the policy had been successful, the charge of groupthink would not be made. Nevertheless the effects of group dynamics on the policy process should not be overlooked.

In the final analysis Johnson's impact on the Vietnam policy process was large and defies any simple explanation.

¹ Ibid., p. 123.

² Ibid., p. 135.

He earnestly worked for the best collective solution to the Vietnam problem, but failed to ever adjust his policy goal. He selected military intervention and escalation as a policy but severely constrained the application of force. For the advancement of his war on poverty, he minimized the long run effects of the real war, and failed to provide a comprehensive program for fighting a long war. Recognizing his shortcomings in foreign policy making he solicited expert advice but never adjusted his preconceptions of the world. The bureaucracy that supported his role as Command-in-Chief received the most support, but the organization that embodied his role as statesman had a lower status in the Vietnam policy process. He sought and received bipartisan Congressional approval for the war but never involved Congress in the formulation of policy. He made sure he had multiple access to information, but mentally insulated himself from divisive assessments. These generalities and many more on President Johnson's foreign policy style, directly influenced the Vietnam policy process. Lastly, it should be remembered that there was also a limit to how much Johnson could control the Vietnam policy process. Vietnam was Johnson's war, but as one of his biographers observes: "...for exaggeration of the President's personal powers (both self-induced and media propelled) is an inevitable source of frustration as the President's actions invariably fall short of expectations, producing a destructive cycle for the man, the office, and the nation."¹

¹ Kearns, p. 400

CHAPTER V

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

In this chapter the study will use the questions policy formulation and legitimation stipulated in the introduction to compare Eisenhower and Johnson administration's Vietnam policy. The Eisenhower administration's policy process is used as the baseline of "control" in the comparison. The analytical focus will be on the differences in the two policy processes. These differences will be used to reach some tentative conclusions about the foreign policy process and intervention. The initial questions on formulation are more objective, i.e., how many sets of actors, appeal points for losers, and if there was a "cooling period" between formulation and implementation? The other two questions concerning the type of formulation (routine, analgous, or creative) and Presidential policy making style are more subjectively interpreted from the policy-process analysis.

The concept of Presidential policy making style is being used to refer to recurrent motifs or patterns of responsive actions which can be collectively identified. It is a descriptive composite of the other factors plus the President's personal imprint on the policy process. His leadership impacts on all the functional aspects of the policy process, especially the creation of policy. Moreover, the President's importance in foreign policy making is too great to be considered and weighted as just another actor. The President creates a unique synergistic effect on the

policy process. The manner in which he attempts to orchestrate policy has a profound influence on all the patterned activities. He cannot control policy making to the extent assumed by the rational model, but his impact on the bureaucratic factors tend to limit and mold their influence. His Presidential style can make the policy process more centralized or decentralized, open or closed, and flexible or inflexible. These functional norms can be expressed in different ways and are not value free. An individual with a liberal orientation might assume that a decentralized, open, and flexible policy process is best, but this assumption is questionable, if there is a need for quick action in international affairs. Here the emphasis will again be on a comparison of the two presidential policy styles and how they affected the interventionist policy process.

In addition to formulation, the presidential policy style plays a significant role in the legitimation function. The way the Presidents and their administrations approached Congress for approval of an interventionist policy will also be compared. Likewise, the impact of Congressional legitimation on the two administration's policy process will be compared and conclusions drawn. The study will end with some general conclusions and implications for further research derived from the comparative analysis.

FORMULATION: CONFLICT AND CONSENSUS

First considering the objective factors in the formulation process we do not need to review all the different policy

proposals and what set of actors were supporting their respective proposal. It is sufficiently clear that at first both administrations produced a plethora of proposals with diverse interagency support. However, because diplomatic alternatives were soon discarded, the options that were seriously considered were soon reduced to a few variations on the use of military force.

The Eisenhower bureaucracy never could resolve their differences. General Ridgway, with the support of the Army, effectively opposed the airstrike option put forth by the Dulles-Radford coalition while the other policy actors to include the Joint Chiefs would not fall in line behind the Secretary or Chairman. Central was Ridgway's ability to appeal to President Eisenhower who had the expertise to judge the military merits of both options. Conversely, after the united action policy was legitimized, the losers appealed the decision as evidenced by Nixon's April speech which can be construed as a trial balloon for unilateral intervention. Also the chosen course of action provided a mandatory gap between legitimation and implementation. The Congressional leaders had required the administration to take the time to find allies before receiving approval for intervention. This restriction provided a "cooling off" period and allowed the desired action to be placed in perspective.

On the other hand, the Johnson bureaucracy developed a consensus in the 1964 post election policy review that North Vietnam would have to be bombed. The State Department

no longer advocated a "political solution" while the Department of Defense united in advocating quick military action. The military consensus rested more on the need to start some type of military action rather than on a unanimous faith in the Rolling Thunder option. Dissenters had access to the President, but had no broad bureaucratic support. The losers' appeals were accommodated as in the case of George Ball by accepting him as a loyal devil's advocate or irreconcilable as in the case of those who resigned or were transferred. Generally once a presidential decision was made, implementation rapidly followed. For example, the United States was fully committed to the air war against the North in less than a week. There was a longer gestation period before the United States was committed to land war, but each incremental troop increase reinforced expectations that a greater involvement would occur. The adoption of successive strategies for security through enclave to search and destroy mirrored this expectation and left little recourse for an alternative policy. By mid-July the President was approving requests for more troops while McNamara was in Saigon getting updated requests for still more troops. Therefore, the United States went from bombing the North to a full intervention in approximately six months.

Although time was available for a more provocative formulation process, the major decisions were made in a crisis management atmosphere which severely limited meaningful deliberations or reassessments of options. The bureaucracy,

in response to misfortunes in Vietnam, provided only short range options or remedies. Whether guided by optimism or pessimism, the decision makers ignored any serious consideration of the need for ground troops at the time of the bombing decision. Likewise, when the decision was made to implement the first phase of Westmoreland's strategy, no firm estimate of the final troop strength or duration of the intervention was made. The military hedged and the policy makers accepted an open-ended military intervention without these essential prognostic limits. There was no Ridgway Report to portray the stark realities of an Asian intervention in a developing country. Among other things neither the cost nor the logistical factors had been wisely considered. Westmoreland admits, "The long delay in providing engineer and logistical backup was an omission that was destined to plague us and to limit our capabilities for a long time."¹ A modern, conventional Army had been committed to fight a protracted, unconventional war in a most primitive setting without any protest from the military establishment. All the major objections of the Ridgway Report against intervention in Vietnam were still valid, but the Army was not objecting. No bureaucratic actor with any collective support was producing any competing proposals by the summer of 1965.

¹ Westmoreland, Reports, p. 127. Approval for the development of port facilities at Can Ranh Bay was not given until 8 June 1965, Papers, Vol. III, p. 412. For an accurate account of the enormity of the construction program, See Richard Tregaskis, Southeast Asia: Building the Bases (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975).

Next, considering the type of policy formulation, both administrations were forced out of the routine policy made by a worsening situation in Vietnam. The status quo could not be maintained by more of the same type of assistance. Also, generally both White House considered Vietnam analogous to the Korean limited war situation and first considered airpower as an effective means of intervention. After it was pointed out that the Korean experience had proved airpower an insufficient instrument alone, the Eisenhower administration attempted to duplicate an earlier European success by creating an Asian version of NATO. Even more so than the European alliance, this Asian partnership was to allow the United States to avoid a ground force commitment. In this manner, the final Eisenhower policy formulation for possible intervention was a blending of two analogous situations where containment policy had been successful. The policy may be considered novel if not unrealistic in omitting the use of American ground forces.

the Johnson policy makers never extended their analogy to any type of true partnership, although the SEATO Treaty was in effect. Like the French had done previously, the political and military leaders did not want to share control with their allies. For example, neither Ambassador Taylor or General Westmoreland had appreciated Sir Robert Thompson's, head of the British Advisory Mission, suggestions on how to conduct a successful low intensity conflict. More importantly the formulation of an allied policy was not realistic because

the Europeans were not interested. However, the Johnson administration did go further back in history to World War II to find an analogy for their bombing campaign. Like the strategic bombing of World War II, Rolling Thunder had a similar objective.

We emphasize that our primary target in advocating a reprisal policy is the improvement of the situation in South Vietnam. Action against the North is usually urged as a means of affecting the will of Hanoi to direct and support the Viet Cong. We consider this an important but long-range purpose. The immediate and critical targets are in the south--in the minds of the South Vietnamese and in the minds of the Viet Cong cadres. (Emphasis in the original).¹

But the 317 volumes of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey had never conclusively proven the effectiveness of this approach to warfare, even when the bombs had been dropped on the primary target.

In committing American ground forces to combat in South Vietnam, both the Commander who proposed the change and the President who approved the policy knew this was a distinct break with past Asian policy. Some analysts maintain there has been a long standing traditional military view or axiom that the United States should not get engaged in a land war on the Asian continent and for many the Korean War confirmed this conviction.² Whether this is true or not, many statesmen and military leaders belonged to this "never again" school

¹ From Bundy's influential February memorandum, Papers, Vol. III, p. 689.

² See Bernard Brodie, War and Politics (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 59.

and had consistently voiced opposition to proposed intervention in Vietnam in 1954 through Laos in 1961 and beyond. Johnson's efforts to delay the revelation that American troops had been given an offensive mission and his solicitious attitude toward Eisenhower are symptomatic of a realization that his policy represented a new precedent. Likewise Westmoreland thought it equally important to get the blessings of General MacArthur who had unsuccessfully sought to prove the Asian axiom wrong. Other military men who did speak out against intervention were J. Lawton Collins, former Chief of Staff of the Army, General James M. Gavin, Ambassador to France under Kennedy, and as to be expected, General Ridgway. Unfortunately from retirement they had little influence on policy. In essence, a new generation of top military leaders thought they would win the war in South Vietnam, and the Johnson administration agreed with this conviction. A "win" policy program for Vietnam by direct intervention was new and unprecedented.

To institute a policy that moved from assistnace to direct responsibility for the war was a radical break with both the Eisenhower and the Kennedy administration's policy programs and had a profound effect on the policy process. While other administrations had closely guarded their prerogative to decrease their commitment as well as add to it, after Rolling Thunder began and the Marines landed, the policy process lost the flexibility inherent in the assistance role. For example, after the Taylor-Rostow report of November 1961 that

specifically advocated a "hard commitment to the ground" an insider reports that Kennedy said:

They want a force of American troops. They say it's necessary in order to restore confidence and maintain morale. But it will be just like Berlin. The troops will march in; the bands will play; the crowds will cheer; and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another.¹

The Johnson administration was not fully aware of the "grammar of war" and thought they could control it. In this instance the policy programs was transformed into a strategy of warfare which excluded options not predicated on force.

This break with past policy in favor of military intervention created further rigidity in the policy process by greatly raising the stakes on the value of the outcome. The major policy actors who had advocated intervention could not afford to alter their policy stance once the United States had been committed to military action. It had been tolerable for a few professional military men to lose their lives in an assistance program, but when the United States became the senior partner in the war and draftees were being killed, American prestige and the public demanded victory. This country has little tolerance for a limited war or the administration who allows it to be prolonged. Unfortunately, Truman realized the truth too late and supported the United

¹ Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, Ibid., p. 505. The Taylor-Rostow report has already been discussed in connection with the follow-on Rusk-McNamara memorandum. See Papers, Vol. 2, pp. 84-120.

Nations resolution for the forceful unification of Korea. "Yet that UN resolution," one presidential scholar later observed "risk imparting to 'what happened' the least fortunate of outcomes from his point of view: the meaning his opponents compressed into two words, 'Truman's War, the bloodletting, 'he' started, would not 'win' and could not stop."¹ The Johnson administration ran a similar risk that Eisenhower had disdained from taking. First, Vietnam became "McNamara's war" and then when the Secretary of Defense resigned, it became "Johnson's war."

From the time the Johnson policy makers had begun an incremental program of overt intervention, their own political fortunes became more and more dependent on the successful prosecution of the war. The country's prestige and their own prestige became intertwined. Consequently, both the national and personal cost finally became too great to admit any basic errors in policy development. The principle actors who had "signed on" for the military solution in the Vietnam problem gradually invested all their political capital in the use of force, first by bombing the North and then a succession of ground strategies in the South. The public sacrifices made this investment irrevocable and demanded success.

This reality resulted in a policy concretion not present in the Eisenhower administration's deliberations.

¹ Richard E. Newstadt. Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1960), p. 125.

The fluidity in the Eisenhower bureaucratic policy processing was maintained by taking a wholistic approach to the problem. The Korean War analogy was not modified with any misplaced faith in the capability of airpower. Although Admiral Radford and the proponents of airpower had advocated such an option, General Ridgway and his supporters had effectively precluded the disjointed consideration of this alternative. If the Eisenhower administration was to lead the country into the Vietnam War, it would not be done though as an incrementally oriented policy process. The complete cost-benefit analysis was finished before the administration moved from the formulation phase into policy legitimation. The Dulles-Radford attempt to gain Congressional approval failed because the full extent and enormous cost of an American intervention was known and included in the policy deliberation. The Johnson administration's policy formulation continually avoided any net assessment of what it would take to reach their policy goal. Small failures only prompted larger commitments.

PRESIDENTIAL POLICY STYLE: STATESMAN AND POLITICIAN

When Kennedy was seriously thinking about sending American troops to Laos in 1961, he reportedly told Walt Rostow, "I can't take a 1954 defeat today," He went on to explain that Eisenhower was able to tolerate the political setback first, because he could blame the French and find support in the country's traditional, anti-colonialist

sentiment, and secondly, because of his popularity as a military leader and President, he had a secure mandate to take such an action.¹ Although Johnson may have made similar unfavorable comparisons between Eisenhower and himself before the 1964 presidential election, after his historic landslide victory, he had the popular support necessary to take a new direction in Vietnam policy. From unilateral withdrawal to complete military intervention, a spectrum of policy choices equal to or surpassing Eisenhower's option at the time of Dien Bien Phu were now available.² Therefore, it is evident that neither President was forced by external events or internal political pressures to select a particular policy outlook toward Vietnam. Neither Chief Executive was completely a free agent, unencumbered by past commitments, future aspiration, or the bureaucracy, both could and did chose opposite courses of action. It may be an obvious redundancy to note that given a similar situation, two different men may chose opposite policies and that it matters which of them is making policy. However, a great deal of political theory designed to explain events such as the Vietnam War would like to ignore this reality so it does bear stating. Now we will turn our attention to the

¹ Quoted in Kalb and Abel, Roots of Involvement, p. 118.

² Tom Wicker explains why American withdrawal would have been particularly easy for Johnson at this time, *idem.*, JFK & LBJ, *Ibid.*, pp. 239-241.

relationship of Presidential policy styles to characteristically different policy processes.

Eisenhower had clearly encouraged diversity in the executive bureaucracy by not forcing a consensus. As late as April both the Ridgway Report and Operation Vulture had their supporters as the President tended to encourage pluralism. Since none of the major actors evidently felt that their personal interests or their organizational interest were put in jeopardy by a strong advocacy role, a decentralized and open policy environment existed with debates in the National Security Council, revised estimates being submitted and "losers" given access to the President. During this time there is no evidence of a groupthink syndrome. There was no unanimity within the group, risks were being assessed and conformity pressure did not build because a simple course of action had not been accepted as the preferred policy option. Eisenhower's experiences as the allied commander during World War II gave him a learned tolerance for bureaucratic ambiguity. Moreover, his military training first as a staff officer, then as a senior commander may also help explain his ability to effectively manage crises in a large bureaucratic setting. Obviously his military expertise would give him the confidence to make an independent assessment of the policy alternatives and not be overly anxious to discover the collective wisdom of the experts. This, in turn, would naturally relieve some conformity pressures which would otherwise build to provide the "best" option to a President who was solely dependent on their expertise.

Ultimately Eisenhower demonstrated his flexibility in the formulation of Vietnam policy by accepting a negotiated settlement. As a former victorious military man and a believer in the domino theory, Eisenhower found this a difficult course of action to pursue. What George Kennan referred to as the "consideration of prestige" or the credibility of the United States seemed to be as much at stake in 1954 as it was in 1965. Both administrations had the policy goal of stopping Communist expansion and perceived equally dire consequences resulting from the "fall" of Vietnam. Coming on the heels of the "loss" of China and the Korean War, the possible loss of all Vietnam gave Eisenhower reason to avoid another setback in Asia. However, he also reasoned that the cost in terms of domestic programs and other foreign policy objectives was too great. There was no illusion about pursuing a balanced budget while conducting an Asian intervention. His clear choice was to revise his Vietnam policy goal. The flexibility in policy formulation based on a less ambitious objective demonstrated a pragmatic realization: to insure a favorable outcome the cost of the military intervention was too great. Although both Presidents based their Vietnam policy decisions on similar concerns for international prestige and consideration for domestic policy, they reached opposite conclusions. Eisenhower correctly perceived his domestic goals becoming more attainable by not intervening in Vietnam and both his personal and the country's prestige suffering no irreparable damage. Johnson, conversely, thought his

great society could only be realized by intervention in Vietnam and both his and the country's credibility would be undermined if he did anything less to solve the Vietnam problem.

However, this perceived linkage between domestic programs and Vietnam intervention by President Johnson did not cause temerity or self doubt. These feelings came years later. When he launched the intervention, he felt confident and in control. In the spring of 1965, he used a vivid analogy to describe the bombing campaign to Senator McGovern to allay his fears about a possible Chinese intervention: "I'm going up her leg (North Vietnam) an inch at a time...I'll get to the snatch before they know what's happening, you see."¹ This presidential assuredness in the use of military force as the correct policy prescription was reflected in the policy process and its changing character. The bureaucratic dissent was stifled or molded into a shallow consensus. In 1954 the Army had provided an alternative perspective and in the period from 1961 through 1963 the State Department had consistently opposed a wider American involvement with Kennedy's encouragement. Johnson's perception of the Vietnam problem facilitated the shift in policy formulation to the almost exclusive purview of the White House staff and to the Defense Department. Quite understandably,

¹ In a quote attributed to Senator McGovern from a conversation he remembers with President Johnson, Gloria Emerson, Winners and Losers, (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 377.

this change in the focus on policy formulating, especially during the Johnson administration's first Vietnam policy review, narrowed the range of analysis and the scope of the options available for implementation. Throughout the remainder of the year, the only tolerated dissenter was George Ball who was beginning to be thought of as a dove-in-residence. In short, Johnson allowed for the institutionalized dissent of a few important policy makers and "domesticated" the others who remained.¹

Johnson's confidence in himself, a few top advisors and the chosen course of action became even more evident in 1965. Consequently, the policy-making process was becoming more exclusive. As opposed to Eisenhower's mixture of the general staff approach in the National Security Council with open debate and personal appeal to the President on an internal basis, Johnson provided his administration only limited internal access to the policy process. The Tuesday lunch meeting or "Tuesday Cabinet" of principal policy makers was the only structured form used for critical decisions on Vietnam. Only a very few top decision makers were allowed to attend these regular meetings which proceeded without an agenda, minutes, or a staff. "Most of the scenario for the conduct of the war," a student of these meetings

¹ For an explanation of the domestication process see James C. Thompson, "How Could Vietnam Happen? A Autopsy, "The Atlantic Monthly, 221, April 1968, pp. 47-63.

wrote, "I quickly discovered, was written on Tuesdays."¹ That his tendency to close off access to the policy process existed at the earliest stages of intervention is further confirmed by the later exclusion of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, when the President sought the counsel of even fewer like minded persons. This tendency and its possible explanation through groupthink leads to the conclusion that Johnson's Vietnam policy process was subjected to ever increasing centralization as opposed to the more open policy making of the Eisenhower administration.

Ironically, Johnson's masterful ability to form a consensus in a Congressional setting became a liability in his executive style. Unlike Senators, cabinet members and White House staffers have no autonomous power base. They are appointed officials who derive their authority from the presidency. These principal members of the administration are not the President's equal, but subordinates who serve him. They will pursue personal and organizational objectives which may be contrary to the President's wishes, but they are rewarded the most for accepting presidential guidance and conforming to his expectations. Consequently, consensus building in the executive branch gives the President a tremendous advantage. A dissenter can delay, obstruct, or

¹ Graff, The Tuesday Cabinet, Ibid., p. 5; Keith C. Clark and Lawrence J. Legere, also provided a good critique of these meetings, idem. The President and the Management of National Security, (New York: Praeger, 1969)

resign in protest, but then in the final analysis he has lost because he has removed himself from power. Johnson demanded general agreement among his advisors and got it. However, this general agreement which is necessary for the implementation of a policy program may be dysfunctional in the policy formulation process.

In contrast to Eisenhower's role as a policy broker or a passive facilitator during the early formulation process, Johnson was an active advocate coming out strongly in favor of a specific option, then leading his advisors toward the same collective opinion. He had little time for critiques that did not propose an alternative solution to the stipulated problem. His emphasis in policy making was not on formulation. Johnson was an implementor, a man of action. When the bombing had proven ineffective, Johnson called in the Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson and told him to go to Vietnam and find out what was needed to turn the tide. "As General Johnson descended in an elevator with the President, following breakfast in the family quarters," according to Westmoreland, "President Johnson towering over the Chief of Staff, thrust an index finger in his breastbone, leaned his face close, and said: 'You get things bubbling, General,'"¹ It is not surprising that the General returned with a laundry list of requests for greater American military involvement.

¹ Westmoreland, Reports, p. 125.

The point is not that a President should remain aloof from the policy formulation process, but that Johnson's domination of the policy process at the early stages was dysfunctional. Obviously, if the policy development is successful in accomplishing its goal, it does not matter if the President early on closes other option or further deliberations. However, whether the President supports an open or closed formulation process becomes important when the policy is ineffective, requiring a reevaluation and new formulation. At this point, after the bombing had been unsuccessful, there was no new formulation based on a thorough reevaluation of original premises or goals. Instead, calling attention to the scope of the deliberations, one scholar observed:

Though the decision called for a massive expansion of American troops, raising the troop level to 200,000 the structure of the decision-making had become so narrowed that Lyndon Johnson received the advice of only five or six men, consulting the National Security Council, the Congress, and the Cabinet only after the decision had been made.¹

The consensus for the chosen course action that Johnson religiously maintained prevented any fresh look at the Vietnam problem or the policy objective which was to solve it. In other words, the fact that the policy process was closed and remained closed, accounts for the dogmatic persistence of the initial perception concerning the nature

¹ Kearns, Ibid., p. 281.

of the war and underestimated means necessary to "win". The strain on the policy system caused by the administration's failure to allow a new policy formulation is well documented. The friction between the gatekeepers of the prevailing consensus and the advisors who dissented resulted in an increasing flow of resignations. Unfortunately for American foreign policy, Johnson was the chief gatekeeper and effectively shut out all attempts at a reevaluation of policy objectives. General Ridgway captured the essence of this policy defect in a story he told to another general about a White House meeting that occurred shortly after Tet 1968:

In the course of a two-hour meeting, there were numerous interruptions by telephone calls to Johnson and by Johnson's aides. During one of these interruptions, Ridgway turned to Vice President Humphrey, his companion in the visit with LBJ, and said that he had "never known what General Westmoreland's mission was." Humphrey replied, "That's a good question, General. Ask the President when he gets off the phone."¹

The question did not get answered that day nor was the answer ever satisfactorily revealed by Johnson's policy process.

LEGITIMATION: ACTIVE AND PASSIVE

A series of events starting with the Great Depression, followed by the New Deal, World War II, and the continuing Cold War had justified the steady accretion of Presidential power. (Presently the Vietnam War and Watergate have at least

¹ Douglas Kinnard. The War Managers, (University Press of New England: New Hampshire: Hanover, 1977), p. 15; also Halberstam, *Ibid.*, p. 145.

slowed this trend). Particularly, the continuing struggle against totalitarianism, first Nazism and then Communism, gave the Congress cause to give the President a free hand in foreign affairs. Bipartisanship, or the concept that foreign policy issues transcend domestic politics or party lines and are only considered on their substantive merit, meant that the Congress would follow the President's lead in foreign affairs. A bipartisan foreign policy was desirable because dramatic shifts in America's relations with other countries would not accompany changes in administrations or the majority party in Congress. The continuity in foreign policy would not be disrupted by party politics. Moreover, the President could approach foreign crises with confidence because he knew his actions would not be subjected to partisan criticism. On the one hand, the President was given an almost unrestricted authority in foreign policy making to include the initiation of hostilities with other countries. On the other hand, the Chief Executive had the responsibility to confer with Congress and justify his actions. As we know, Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson had two different views on bipartisanship and the Congressional role in the Vietnam policy.

In brief, Eisenhower did not try to force or manipulate a Congressional consensus for intervention. He did not rely on bipartisanship to legitimize a policy that had already been formulated and approved by him for implementation. The April meeting with Secretary Dulles and Admiral Radford

gave Congressional leaders direct access to the policy formulation process. What is important is the reality that Congress helped formulate the policy. The policy process was sufficiently open to allow for Congressional input. Obviously, committee hearings or a floor debate would have been too much Congressional participation at this stage of policy making in such a sensitive area as foreign intervention. However, Eisenhower did seek to discharge his responsibility to the Congress before mobilizing the authority of the presidency for either a non-interventionist or interventionist policy. Congressional bipartisanship was not being used as a rubber stamp to legitimize a predetermined course of action. Eisenhower accepted Congress as a responsible partner in the Vietnam policy making. As we know, part of the reasons for this Presidential discretion is explained by immediate circumstances and the distribution of political power in the Congress. But a more basic reason was Eisenhower's conception of the proper relationship between the legislature and the executive. He fervently believed that Congress and not the President decides when the United States intervenes or goes to war. Only in extreme emergencies did he feel that his authority to take military action preceded his responsibility to consult with Congress. Consequently, in matters of military intervention, Eisenhower conceived bipartisanship as being based on mutually formulated as well as legitimized policy. In decisions on war the President and Congress were to have an equally important role.

President Johnson had a different conception of Congress's role in an interventionist policy process. The President defined the goals, formulated the policy, then expected Congress to provide the means for the policy's implementation. Congressional input was not sought nor required during Vietnam policy formulation. Congressional leaders were consulted to mobilize support for the chosen policy. They did not have access to the decision making and any objections to presidential policy had no effect on its implementation. The President decided on a course of action before Congress was formally consulted in all cases. In short, the administration's Vietnam policy had been completely formulated and legitimized by the President before Congress was allowed to enter the policy process. After the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the presidential election, Johnson assumed he had both the legal and popular authority necessary to deny Congress any appreciable role in the Vietnam policy process. Bipartisanship was only needed to ratify what was already a policy reality. Congress played no direct role in Vietnam policy formulation and only a secondary role in the legitimization of the war.

However, indirectly through Johnson's concern for his domestic programs, Congress influenced Vietnam policy. The President thought it was crucial to maintain bipartisan Congressional support for the intervention because he wanted to maintain a legislative consensus for the great society programs. This linkage between the Vietnam War and

domestic politics directly effected the prosecution of the war. As one analyst argues:

The immoderate moderation of American policy, the rigid adherence to a middle-of-the-road course that is often the most dangerous way to travel, stems from a common-sense devotion to consensus. And trying once again to follow a middle course between falsely conceived extremes proved our undoing.¹

Johnson was trying to woo both the hawks and the doves so they would not become disgruntled and take their frustration about his war policy out on the great society. Johnson considered the Congress a silent partner to his Vietnam policy, always measuring each new initiative against its potential for disrupting his domestic policy. He did not want to risk exposing his Vietnam policy to even limited debate because of the possible spill over into the domestic arena. Congress was denied access to the decision making partially to maintain Vietnam policy in a low profile and keep access to information as restricted as possible to prevent any inflammatory debates.

The President's attitude towards Congress severely constrained the formulation of Vietnam policy, but Congress had no direct role in the policy making. Johnson's pessimism about his ability to hold a consensus for domestic reforms while involved in a national controversy over foreign policy forced him into a strategy of "immoderate moderation" in Vietnam. Fear of a right wing conservative reaction foreclosed

¹ James MacGregor Burns. Uncommon Sense (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 53.

the formulation of any policy of withdrawal or negotiations on a "neutralized" Vietnam. Likewise, Johnson thought the liberals would desert him if he took the country into a mid-intensity war with full mobilization of men and resources. In opposition to the Pentagon advice, Johnson did not declare a "state of emergency," call up the military reservists, or go to Congress with a tax package to support the war. The people and Congress were not to be alerted that the country was entering a limited war of unknown duration and sacrifices would be necessary. These were the restraints which bound the President's policy formulation, but the policy was not made from a pessimistic perspective.

Johnson's optimism and belief in America's pioneering spirit symbolized by a gun and an ax were translated into an interventionist policy. The gun or the military would still get the job done because his "experts" said they would. The ax or the economy could support a limited war and still have the increases in productivity necessary to finance the great society. The nation could have guns and butter, if the President kept tight control and did not lose his Congressional consensus. The United States would maintain its international prestige and contain Asian Communism. The Vietnam policy goal with a low public profile. Starting with a request for additional appropriation of only 1.8 billion dollars, Johnson could delay the fiscal impact of the war. In similar fashion, by extending enlistments and instituting an inequitable draft, favoring the more affluent, he could

postpone the negative reactions to the social disruption caused by the war. In short, Johnson, as the Commander-in-Chief, led the United States into a major war without an acknowledgment being made or demanded by the Congress.

Bipartisanship was effectively used to deny Congress any role in the Vietnam policy making process. But this reality cannot be totally explained by Johnson's masterful control of consensus politics. After his crushing defeat to Nixon in the 1972 presidential election, one writer asked Senator McGovern what he regretted most in his political career. He did not mention his defeat or the poor choice of Senator Thomas Eagleton as his running mate. Instead he stated:

I regret voting for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. It angers me that it was used as justification for accelerating the war. No one would have voted for it if we had been told that is what it was for.¹

Many Congressesmen share this regret, but it hardly explains the money that was appropriated to support the war or Congress's general acquiesce if not positive support for the Vietnam intervention. We have already explored some of the institutional factors and Johnson's presidency as major reasons why Congress did not demand more access to the decision making process, but part of the explanation is the Congress. Most Congressmen, because the political payoff is small in terms of their constituency, would not devote the necessary time or energy

¹ Gloria Emerson, Winners and Losers, Ibid., p. 378.

to foreign policy. Few Congressmen could successfully convert expertise in foreign affairs into political capital needed to win elections. Researchers have found too little correlation between peoples' attitudes and foreign policy issues to provide strong incentives for Congressional politicians. So rather than waste their time in this politically unproductive area, most Congressmen took their cue from the President, endorsing bipartisanship. This was not a selfless act done solely for the good of the country. For if Congress opposed the President, as it did President Wilson over the Versailles Treaty, and the results were unpopular, then Congress, not the President, will suffer the electoral consequences. If, on the other hand, the legislator follows presidential guidance and votes for his programs such as the Marshall Plan, he reaps the benefits of a successful policy or as in the case of Vietnam, he can justifiably disassociate himself from a poor policy with the following ploy: "Well, Mr. Voter, I had some doubts about that policy but it was my duty to support our President." The public will generally accept this ploy.¹

Thus, bipartisanship or the primacy of the President in foreign policy, especially in more sensitive issue areas such as Vietnam intervention, served the political interests of individual Congressmen. It was a means of rationalizing

¹ Francis Wilcox. Congress, The Executive and Foreign Policy, published for the Council on Foreign Relations, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 70.

Congressional lack of expertise in foreign affairs and insulating the lawmakers from the consequences of a faulty policy. There is no guarantee that greater Congressional expertise or political party involvement would result in a more effective policy process, but it should be expected in an open society:

Arguments advanced in behalf of bipartisan foreign policy usually presuppose that by some kind of unexplained process, the government will automatically follow the course best calculated to serve the public interest, if only partisanship can be avoided... Most infrequently is there recognition among supporters of the bipartisan principle that parties, with all their faults, and democratic government are inextricably connected, and that occasional excesses by political parties are part of the price, a democracy must pay for the freedom it prizes so highly.¹

Whether as responsible individuals, coalitions, or parties, Congress must demand access to foreign policy making.

Eisenhower could not have denied Congress access to the policy process before the policy was formulated and still expected support for an American intervention at Dien Bien Phu. All in the spirit of bipartisanship, the Congressional leaders demanded access to the policy formulation process and helped design the administration's policy. They were not depending solely on the administration's explanation of where a particular policy would lead the nation, but advising the President on what Congress thought should be done. It could have been otherwise.

¹ Cecil V. Crabb, Jr. Bipartisan Foreign Policy: Myth or Reality?, (White Plains, New York: Row and Peterson, 1957) p. 241.

If Congress had been passive, Senator Lyndon Johnson may have said of Operation Vulture, "No one would have voted for it if we had been told..." Instead in 1965 President Johnson took the United States into the longest war in its history, without a declaration of war or as much as a specific resolution of support from the Congress. In short, Congress was left on the side lines of the policy process to simply rubber stamp the President's Vietnam policy.

CONCLUSION

"I can't get out, I can't finish it with what I've got. So what the hell can I do?"¹

As a result of the preceding comparative analysis, this study concludes that the Johnson administration's policy process was comparatively exclusionary, and, as a result, not effective in formulating Vietnam policy. In comparison to the more open Eisenhower policy making, the dysfunctional policy-making elements in the Johnson administration contributed to an ill-considered military intervention. The assumption validated by this study is not whether the United States should or should not have intervened but that the policy process did not sustain a thorough evaluation of the alternatives and the cost of being an intervantor. The policy system did not work. However, the importance of this conclusion is not confined to the scholarly satisfaction of providing additional insights on this nation's Vietnam policy.

It is a global reality that intervention has replaced formally declared wars, and the United States must be prepared to intervene to protect its national interest. In the post Vietnam era, detente has not eradicated superpower confrontations and intervention. In the Mideast and Africa both the United States and the Soviet Union has pursued a policy of limited intervention. Detente or peaceful co-existence seems to mean a struggle for a favorable accomodation with Third World Nationalism. Although the diversity in the world is better

¹ Johnson quoted by Lady Bird, Spring 1965. A White House Diary in Pettit, p. 219.

understood and acknowledged. Two irreconcilable belief systems still vie for dominance. Nuclear parity has not eliminated the use of force in international relations but merely shifted conflict more toward a controlled type of limited warfare. The danger of escalation has diminished the utility of force in superpower confrontations, but the use of proxies and extensive military assistance programs have substituted for direct intervention.

This type of vicarious conflict may continue into the foreseeable future, but there is also reason to believe that the United States may again be forced to consider direct military intervention as a policy alternative. The central idea of the Nixon doctrine was to limit American intervention.¹ Treaty commitments would be honored but internal security assistance would be provided on a selected basis involving no substantial American manpower. However, world events are now stimulating a move away from an American policy of such restraint and aloofness. The recent Soviet record of intervention in Angola, Rhodesia and the Ethiopia-Somalia dispute has caused the Carter administration to seek a more active African policy. In late May 1978 American troops were put on alert for a possible rescue mission in Zaire, and the administration began lobbying Congress for a freer hand in

¹ President Nixon first articulated the doctrine in July 1969 and summed up the new policy in the State of the Union Message on 22 January 1970 by stating, "We shall be faithful to our treaty commitment, but we shall reduce our involvement and our presence in other nation's affairs." Herald Tribune, 23 Jan 70.

African affairs. It is plausible that the Nixon doctrine, similar to Acheson's defense perimeter statement, has provided the impetus for advisory initiatives in areas not covered by formal treaties. Thus, we need only acknowledge the possibility of another massive American intervention to see that the study of the Vietnam policy process transcends academic curiosity. In the very near future, the United States may once again be contemplating an interventionist policy without ever having thoroughly evaluated the past policy processes responsible for generating such protentious outcomes.

Before the Nation is again overtaken by events which will demand a specific policy on intervention somewhere else in the world, policy makers must learn from the Vietnam experience. Regarding the policy process, this study suggests some fertile areas for further analysis and possible remedial action. But first a word about an area that seems to have the least potential for yielding practical results. Structural changes in the policy system did not produce parallel improvements in the policy process or its output. The Eisenhower administration which maintained a more formalized organization exhibited a higher degree of flexibility in policy processing than the Johnson administration with its informal Tuesday Cabinet. Structural and administrative changes between the two administrations were designed to shift the center of policy making from the National Security Council to the Department of State. However, as the study points out, the mere assignment of roles on an organizational chart does not

guarantee power will be focused at that point. In reality, the Secretary of State and his department only played a supporting role in the Vietnam intervention. This is not to say that organizational changes do not affect the policy process, but that they do not fundamentally alter the power relationships which develop for other factors which deserve more attention.

First, there is a need for better knowledge both factual and conceptual. The definition of the problem and the formulation of alternatives cannot be adequately accomplished unless policy makers are knowledgeable. For the Johnson administration a poorly defined problem and lack of understanding about the nature of the Vietnamese conflict resulted in false predictions and fuzzy policy goals. There was no Ridgway Report to point out the pitfalls of military intervention. Short-sighted military strategies were substituted for a thorough analysis of the socio-political situation in Vietnam. Suitable policy outcomes are predicated on an accurate prediction of alternatives formulated to solve a well-defined problem. With more and better knowledge, predictions of what an American intervention may cost and yield will become more a product of a rational policy-making process.

Secondly, useful knowledge cannot exist in a vacuum. It must be consolidated into some form of planning for possible contingencies evolving intervention. The purpose of such planning is to avoid or at least mitigate the adverse

effects of hasty, crisis oriented policy making. Bureaucracies cannot be expected to readily respond to crises in ways that they have not thoroughly planned for. Although weak inter-agency coalitions wanted to apply innovative approaches to Vietnam involvement, no new strategic concept for dealing with low intensity conflicts were implemented. These initiatives were overridden by the more traditional warfare planning that took place in the MACV Headquarters. In a crisis atmosphere policy makers would not accept untried options which had not been thoroughly planned and had not been endorsed by a bureaucratic consensus. In other words, new knowledge will probably not be used in policy making unless it is incorporated in the bureaucratic planning process before a crisis erupts.¹ How interventionist policy should be planned, coordinated, and implemented, if necessary, must be considered by all concerned agencies and not ignored until a crisis forces its consideration.

Thirdly, individuals are the basic units of organizations which determine policy. In the Vietnam policy process personalities played an important role. The President and his appointed policy makers tried to control the policy process. They created a climate of receptivity or exclusion to new ideas or inputs. It is a tautology that other things being equal, good people can be expected to make better policy.

¹ There is little evidence that much progress has been in this area since Vietnam. See Donald B. Vought, "Preparing for the Wrong War?" Military Review 5 (May 1977): pp. 16-34.

Analysis centered on people and how they fulfill their roles as individuals, members of a group or bureaucracy in the policy process must be continued. Policy makers especially Presidents must be made to realize the impact they have on the policy process. The contrasting roles Eisenhower and Johnson played in Vietnam policy formulation had a profound influence on the deliberations. If a President wishes to dominate the policy process, he must be made aware of the liabilities associated with this approach. If he desires a bureaucratic consensus on intervention, he will prevail in the short run, but valid objections are not reconciled by ignoring them. In the long run policy is judged on effectiveness not consensus.

The final area in need of further consideration is the political nature of the policy process itself. This study has offered a comparative look at two administrations deciding upon an interventionist policy in Vietnam. The Eisenhower policy process was described as "open" because it was able to accommodate and assimilate more diverse influences in the formulation and legitimation of policy. There was bureaucratic conflict and a straining for consensus. Relative openness including Congressional input gave the process a pluralistic character. In contrast, the Johnson policy process was more "closed" to independent - minded men in the administration, Congress and the public. This study does not validate the conclusion that more participation in policy making insures a better policy, but it does highlight the difficulties

encountered when access to the policy process becomes too restrictive. Obviously there is a definite limit on how democratic the foreign policy process can be, especially in matters of military intervention. However, this limit is in need of further exploration. Rather than separate powers, the President and Congress have shared responsibilities for considering policy that might lead to conflict. These roles are not well defined and are more a function of political power than any written statute.

These and other areas alluded to in the study do not begin to exhaust the possibilities for further research. The Vietnam policy process is sufficiently current to be relevant to contemporary policy considerations, and a surprising number of primary sources are already available. The only possible impasse to worthwhile research lies in the emotional controversy which still surrounds the subject. This is an artificial barrier which must be breached with dispassionate analysis, focused on future application rather than past failings.

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